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ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON



ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

Poet Laureate

A BRIEF STUDY OF HIS LIFE AND POETRY

BY

ARTHUR JENKINSON

MINISTER OF THE PARISH OF INNELLAN

AUTHOR OF "A MODERN DISCIPLE"

"That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves."

IN MEMORIAM.

LONDON

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET

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TO MY
FATHER AND MOTHER
WITH REVERENCE AND GRATITUDE
I DEDICATE
This Little Book.



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P R E F A C E.

THIS little book is mainly occupied with Lord Tennyson as a great moral and religious teacher. It has been my wish to provide a short introduction to his poems that are concerned with the highest spiritual problems. I have put together whatever interesting facts I could gather regarding his life and surroundings that help us to understand the man and his teaching. In setting before myself this aim, I have not forgotten that Tennyson was a great poet rather than a philosopher or theologian, and that we do him a certain injustice in attempting to consider the substance of his message apart from its poetic form. But it must be borne in mind that although a poet, his chief vocation was not to delight or amuse. No philosopher or theologian has been so widely recognised as the teacher and prophet of his age as Tennyson. Thousands reverence him as the spiritual leader who brought them out of the wilderness of

religious doubt into the promised land of a larger faith. Indeed, great poets like Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson have increased the tendency to turn away from the accredited teachers of morals and religion to the poets. There is a wide-spread feeling that with reference to the supreme interests of life they are less entangled by foregone conclusions, that they are more honest and sympathetic, and see deeper into the eternal realities.

"I dare to say," exclaims Archdeacon Farrar, "that I have learnt more of high and holy teaching from Dante, and Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson, than I have learnt from many professed divines;" and he goes on to say that "next to the immediate teachings of the Spirit of Christ, the Hebrew Prophets, and the Apostles of the New Testament, he would place the illumined souls of the few supreme Christian poets of the world."

I have in this little volume specially drawn the reader's attention to the fact that when Lord Tennyson was confronted by the negations of the understanding, he fell back on the primary beliefs and intuitions of the heart. Baffled and tormented by

questions he could not answer, he exclaimed, "*I have felt.*" I have noticed that this cannot be the *final* attitude of the Christian consciousness to the problem of existence. Heart and intellect, faith and reason, cannot be in absolute antagonism. We cannot be content with such a dualism. What I have most briefly suggested, and would emphasise again, is that this appeal to faith and feeling is really an appeal to the soul in all the wealth of its experience against a crude and imperfect logic. It is all that is best and noblest in man's nature and history rising up against denial and doubt. I want the reader to realise that there is no quarrel between Faith and Reason; the quarrel is rather between Faith and what Thomas Carlyle has very properly called the "logic-chopping" faculty. There is in our primary beliefs in God, Duty, and Immortality the deepest reason; they are Reason in its most intense and concrete form, and will therefore be able to justify themselves against the scepticism of the age. We look confidently forward to a comprehensive Christian philosophy that will harmonise all the elements at present in conflict.

The various books from which I have derived

help are referred to in the course of the work. I should especially like to mention my obligation to Mr. George Easter, of the City Library, Norwich, and his assistants. That ancient city is my birth-place, and I was staying there when it was suggested to me to write this book, and Mr. Easter most kindly gave me all the help in his power. I have also much pleasure in thanking Messrs. Macmillan & Co. for permission to quote from Lord Tennyson's poems.

A. J.

THE MANSE, INNELLAN, ARGYLESHIRE,
November 1892.

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I.

THE GOLDEN DAWN.

“The Poet in a Golden Clime was born,
With Golden Stars above.”—*The Poet.*

“ Thus, while at times before our eyes
The shadows melt, and fall apart,
And, smiling through them, round us lies
The warm light of our Morning Skies—
The Indian Summer of the heart !—
In secret sympathies of mind,
In founts of feeling which retain
Their pure, fresh flow, we yet may find
Our Early Dreams not wholly vain ! ”

—WHITTIER.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE GOLDEN DAWN.

“ The child is father of the man ;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.”

—WORDSWORTH.

LINCOLNSHIRE has been so often described as a region of marsh and fen, that in the popular imagination the whole county is a dreary level of misty pasture-land, only partially recovered from the swampy morasses and shallow lagoons where formerly nothing flourished but luxuriant crops of sedge and reed, among which every variety of wild-fowl found a happy home :

“ A flat malarian land of reed and rush,”

across which the bitter Norland blast sweeps in winter ; and where in summer monotonous grassy plains are unrelieved save by an occasional wind-mill or lonely church, with here and there a soli-

tary willow or ash overhanging tangled and shallow streams.

But such is not the case. There are, it is true, not a few outlying corners in the Fen District unreclaimed, and there must have been many more eighty years ago. And in these the traveller may still find some solitary fen-man who ekes out a precarious existence by fowling and fishing, netting and snaring, and by cutting the sedge and reeds that grow in thick fringes along the sides of these marshes. But, for the most part, the Fen District itself, through the unwearied efforts of its hardy inhabitants during the last two centuries, has become one of the richest corn-growing parts of England. The change wrought by the "Northern farmer" on Thurnaby Waste has gone on everywhere.

But further, it must be borne in mind that a considerable portion of the county was never fen-land at all. There is an extensive range of moderately high ground stretching from north to south all along its western border; and to the east the chalk tract of the wolds sweeps up from the fen-land, forming a hilly district some fifty miles in length and seven or eight in breadth.

Not far from where the southern extremity of these wolds sinks towards the fens, nestles the little hamlet of Somersby; so called, probably, by the

descendants of the roaming Norsemen, who first made their home there, because "the birds and flowers seemed to tell how the sun lovingly lingered over it." It is a sequestered and peaceful spot, far away from the large excitement that stirs in the great world beyond the circle of its protecting hills. The nearest towns are Horncastle and Spilsby. It consists of about half a score cottages scattered in quiet nooks round about a tiny church and rectory, and appears to have never possessed a population of more than sixty or seventy souls. Far away from the world, even yet, at the time when our story begins, it must have seemed like one of those old religious settlements, whither the faint echoes of the great movements stirring the century came in softest murmurs, and at long intervals, when they came at all.

Somersby has one great advantage in its situation. It is within walking distance of a great variety of scenery, where, if Nature does not clothe herself in her more majestic and lovely forms, she at least appeals with strange power to the imagination and heart. Southward, what remains of the fens may be seen. On a bright summer's day, this district is resplendent in purple and yellow, green and gold; or, at evening, it has a strange eerie aspect as the "wide-winged sunset of the misty marsh"—and sunsets are nowhere more beautiful than in these

wide, level reaches—fades away in the red west, and spectral shadows sweep silently around, and the soft wind rises and sighs among the tall reeds, over which the evening star has set her watch. Away in the east are the long sandy tracts across which the plunging seas sweep far inland, and then again withdraw “their moon-led waters white,” leaving behind many a still salt pool. To the north there are the ridged wolds, their grey sides belted with clusters of noble trees, and from which may be heard the gentle chiming of bells as the sheep seek their wattled folds.

One day, nearly eighty years ago, the wind was sweeping across these Lincolnshire wolds, and tossing the elms and poplars in the old Rectory garden of Somersby into wild disorder, when a little child, with shining locks and large brown eyes, ran from the house, and throwing out his arms to the wind, exclaimed in an ecstasy of delight—

“I hear a voice that’s speaking in the wind.”

This was Alfred Tennyson, and this, I believe, was the first line of poetry he ever composed. He was born on the 6th of August 1809, and was then about five years of age.

His father, the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, LL.D., was a tall, handsome man, “high-souled and high-tempered,” renowned for his great strength

and varied accomplishments. He was also said to possess "a certain hardness of temperament, which, combined with other high qualities, won respect rather than love." On being presented to the Rectory of Somersby (united with Bag Enderby) in 1808, he removed thither with his young wife, who was the daughter of the Rev. Stephen Fytche, Vicar of Louth, and whom he had married three years previously. In the course of years they were blessed with a large family of twelve children, of whom Alfred was the fourth, the eldest dying in infancy. Dr. Tennyson came of a good old stock. He could trace his family through a long descent, in which were blended "the middle-class line of the Tennysons, and the noble and even royal line of the D'Eyncourts." He watched over the education of his children, who seem to have held him in the deepest honour and affection; but he died in 1831, at the comparatively early age of fifty-two.

The poet's mother lived to the advanced age of eighty-five, and according to Lord Tennyson's testimony as he returned a middle-aged man from her grave, "she was the beautifullest thing that God Almighty ever made!"¹ "Mrs. Tennyson," says Mrs. T. Ritchie, "was a sweet and gentle and most imaginative woman, so kind-hearted that it had passed into a proverb. . . . She was intensely, fer-

¹ *Times* for October 12, 1892. Letter from Bishop of Exeter.

vently religious, as a poet's mother should be." ¹ It was doubtless from her that her sons inherited their poetic gifts. There can, I think, be little doubt that personal experience breathes through the lines in the "Confessions of a Sensitive Mind" beginning with the words—

"Would that my gloomed fancy were
As thine, my mother."

Happy in their parents, the old Rectory was an ideal home for this remarkable family—picturesque, rambling, quaint; the dining-room, erected by Dr. Tennyson, with its long, pointed, stained-glass windows, giving it a semi-ecclesiastical appearance. It stands upon the slope of a hill, looking down upon a dainty lawn and old-fashioned garden, where yet stand the "seven elms" of which the poet sings in his "Ode to Memory," although the "poplars four" and the "towering sycamore" are gone. It was one of those fair homes of refinement and peace that are the sweetest feature of English life, and which you must go far to find elsewhere. Hard by stands the modest church, and within the churchyard an ancient Norman cross, its very seclusion saving it from destruction in the ages of Puritanic zeal. All round about is a pretty well-wooded pastoral country. At the foot of the glebe runs the brook of which the

¹ *Harper's Magazine*, December 1883.

poet so often sung, and close by is a picturesque glen known by the old monkish name of Holywell, where the mavis and the blackbird herald the early spring and the robin sings his plaintive notes, among the lengthening shadows, to the dying year.

Among these scenes Alfred Tennyson passed his childhood and youth. "You may see," wrote Thomas Carlyle to Emerson, "that he is a native of moated granges and green flat pastures, not of mountains and their torrents." Every feature of interest was photographed upon his memory and reproduced in his poetry. Our first impressions are the strongest. The scenes of youth become part of our very selves; they tinge our thoughts, they mould our minds, they haunt our imaginations through life. It was so with Tennyson. In after life he dwelt far away from these Lincolnshire scenes, but we read none of his poems without being reminded of them, and, of course, such poems as "The May Queen," "Locksley Hall," "The Northern Farmer," "The Northern Cobbler," "The Village Wife," and many others, belong wholly to Lincolnshire. When he sings about the rivulet in the flowery dell, the building rook in the windy tall elm tree, the wild marsh-marigold that shines like fire in swamps and hollows grey, the long grey fields and the dry dark wold, the oat-grass and the sword-grass, and the bulrush in the pool, and a thousand other such-like

things, we know that his heart has gone back to the home where he saw the dawn of life.

In this happy old Lincolnshire Rectory the family lived an ideal life. Not only was the father a man of varied gifts, something of a poet, painter, architect, musician, and man of general culture, and the mother devout, imaginative, gracious, but brothers and sisters were all distinguished for their attainments. They were a "nest of nightingales;" the air of the house was full of song. Frederick and Charles became no mean poets, whose published works, but for the overshadowing genius of Alfred, would have secured wider recognition. Shut up in this remote village, with few companions outside their own large circle, they knew little of the world beyond their native hills. Even the news of the battle of Waterloo did not reach them until some time after it was fought. But they lived their own ideal life, in which the spirit of romance and chivalry mingled with the influences of pious living. In their games they became transfigured into ancient knights and kings, and waged again the battles that once shook the world. Within doors they played at authorship, and could no sooner write than they wove their ideas of life into verses and romances long and endless—Alfred's, which lasted for months, being called "The Old Horse."

In such a numerous family, special attachments

between the brothers and sisters would be sure to be formed, and between Alfred and Charles, who was the elder of the two by some twelve months, there existed a close bond of sympathy. It is said that he was the first to discover Alfred's gift for writing verses; for putting a slate into his hands one Sunday afternoon when their elders were at church, he told him to write a poem on the flowers, which he did in blank verse, after the model of Thomson's "Seasons." He won from Charles the admission, "Yes, you can write." Such is the story as told by Mrs. Ritchie, although Mr. Alfred Church says that Lord Tennyson's impression was that the first subject of his muse was "The Death of Julius Cæsar."¹ This incident took place at Louth, whither the two boys had gone to attend the Grammar School. There Alfred remained until 1820, learning, as far as he remembers, very little. About this time both he and Charles returned to Somersby, and for the next eight years were taught by their father. Frederick, the eldest son, had gone to Eton. Few are the glimpses we get of them during those eight years. Charles and Alfred appear to have been inseparable. They went for long walks together, and both earnestly cultivated poetry. Alfred was passionately fond of Scott and Byron, and when, in 1824, the news reached Somersby that Byron's short

¹ "The Laureate's Country," p. 53. By Rev. A. J. Church.

career had reached its untimely end, his young admirer, then a boy of fifteen, walked into Holywell Glen in a fit of inconsolable grief, and carved on the sandstone, "Byron is dead." "I thought," he said long afterwards to a friend, "the whole world was at an end; I thought that everything was over and finished for every one, and nothing else mattered."

During these years he is generally pictured as a shy student, wandering about book in hand, or wrapped up in some deep reverie; which, however, does not altogether agree with Lord Tennyson's own recollections of that period.¹ According to the testimony of Mrs. Ritchie, his first efforts in the way of poetic expression were little appreciated by his relations. His grandfather, it is said, once asked him to write an elegy on his grandmother, who had recently died, and when it was written he put half a guinea in his hand, saying, "There, that is the first money you have ever earned for your poetry, and take my word for it, it will be the last."

¹ "The Laureate's Country," p. 31.

II.

FIRST FLIGHTS OF SONG.

“The Poet hath the child’s sight in his breast
And sees all *new*. What oftenest he has viewed
He views with the first glory.”—E. B. BROWNING.

“ A Poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.”

—SHELLEY.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST FLIGHTS OF SONG.

“God sent His singers upon earth,
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to Heaven again.”

—LONGFELLOW.

MR. R. H. HUTTON, in an exceedingly suggestive essay on Tennyson,¹ has said that his earliest efforts consisted of brilliant pictures without a soul in them, but that after he had encountered “the shadow fear’d of man,” they became infused with a spirit that could create its own music. I think this judgment correct, although, as I shall endeavour to show in this chapter, Tennyson was always something more than an exquisite literary artist. From the beginning he was an earnest thinker, whose art was made to minister to the highest interests of man’s spiritual life. Still, as might be expected, most of his early poems are distinguished more for their delight in the vision of beauty than for their spiritual insight. We have now to consider those first flights of song which

¹ *Macmillan’s Magazine*, December 1872.

preceded the richer music that flowed from his harp later on.

Already we have seen that Dr. Tennyson gave his boys ample opportunity to live their own life. It soon became evident that the Muse of poetry had already won their hearts. There is an old nursery story that Alfred had always declared that he would be a poet. Although strong and healthy, Charles and he never seem to have engaged in any out-of-door sports. But books were their constant companions. They read widely and to good purpose. They took long walks together, and were always writing verses. Frederick, the eldest in the family, was away at college, and the other brothers were too young to share their interests. Thus these two were always together.

Charles was not only the elder of the two, but was in every way fitted to encourage and guide his brother. All who knew him unite in describing him as a beautiful soul. In after years he became a clergyman, and wrote exquisite sonnets, and was known as Charles Tennyson Turner. Dr. Alex. H. Japp says,¹ "The beautiful soul is seen in every movement of his muse. . . . His mind is like a crystal to take the shape and colour of what is presented to it, and seen in that crystal all is transformed, beautified." Mrs. Ritchie, in her delightful "Remi-

¹ "The Poets and the Poetry of the Century," p. 53.

niscences," says he was "gentle, spiritual, very noble, simple. I once saw him kneeling in a church, and only once again. He was like something out of another world, more holy, more silent, than that in which most of us are living." In the seventy-ninth poem of "In Memoriam" there is a lovely reference to Charles and those early years. Notice also the exquisite poem written in 1879 as a preface to his brother's sonnets.

For nearly eight years Charles and Alfred lived this free and happy life at Somersby. Slowly a considerable stock of verses accumulated, and in 1827 a little volume entitled "Poems by Two Brothers" appeared. The publisher was Mr. J. Jackson of Louth. The preface states: "The following poems were written from the ages of fifteen to eighteen, not conjointly, but individually, which may account for their differences of style and matter." Numerous footnotes and quotations from a vast variety of authors indicate the amazing industry of the young poets and the seriousness with which they had already taken life. Mr. Jackson showed great enterprise and insight, that he not merely undertook to publish this volume, but agreed to pay the boys ten pounds for the copy-right, and actually paid them twenty pounds. So the grandfather's prophecy was soon discredited in a very pleasant way. There is a great interest in this little book, a single copy of which, only the other day,

fetched almost as much as was originally paid for the copyright. It has never been republished, and yet here are collected, as into one small basket, the first fruits of two gifted minds, one of which has, for more than sixty years, enriched the whole English-speaking world with priceless harvests of song.

The next year Alfred Tennyson followed his two brothers, Frederick and Charles, to Trinity College, Cambridge. This was a critical moment in his life. He was nineteen years of age. He now passed into a great centre of intellectual life. There is no place in the world more significant to a highly imaginative and thoughtful youth than an ancient University. It is not merely that he there meets with those who will help him to unlock the doors to the rich stores of wisdom accumulated from all past times, and with eager young minds enthusiastic and fearless in their search for truth; but the University itself stands as the noble representative of the great traditions of human knowledge. If he is at all capable of being touched by the true spirit of the place, he will tread its courts, for the first time, with mingled awe, modesty, joy. A day or two after Lord Tennyson's death I visited Cambridge, and walked across the quadrangle of Trinity, and round to the beautiful "Backs," and over the picturesque bridge that crosses the willow-veiled Cam, and up the stately "Avenue of Limes." The whole splendid pile of buildings,

with its hall, chapel, library; its lawns, gardens, trees, rich in their autumn tints, seemed to me transfigured in the solemn and pathetic beauty of the October sun, and I could not help wondering what he, who then lay in the majesty of death, thought of all that exquisite loveliness and stately dignity when he first gazed upon it on that far-off day in October 1828 on which he went up to keep terms. He has not told us, but another visit was paid to Cambridge, years after, when his mind was full of thoughts of his lost friend Arthur Hallam. The eighty-seventh poem of "In Memoriam" not only recalls this visit, but also presents a vivid picture of the joys and friendships of his old college days.

He went up to Cambridge in 1828 and left in February 1831, through the premature death of his father. He never seems to have devoted himself seriously to the regular college work. Nevertheless, his stay there had much to do with the development of his mind and with his future career. Not only did he meet with Hallam at Cambridge, of whom I shall speak later on, but also a wide circle of young men distinguished for culture, brilliancy, and force, most of whom attained to eminence in after life. There were Richard Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton), Henry Alford, afterwards the accomplished Dean of Canterbury; James Spedding, J. M. Kemble, W. H. Brookfield, Merivale, afterwards Dean of Ely;

Richard Chenevix Trench, who became Archbishop of Dublin, and a sweet Christian poet; John Sterling, Edward Lushington, afterwards Tennyson's brother-in-law and Professor of Greek at Glasgow University; Lord Stanley, and some others. In the canto of "In Memoriam" just referred to, these gifted minds are represented as "the band of youthful friends" who used to meet in Hallam's rooms for debate. They formed a little society for this purpose, called the "Apostles," to become a member of which was a mark of distinction.

Amid all the enthusiasms of this new life, it is evident that Tennyson kept steadily before him the vocation to which he felt consecrated. It was during his first year at Cambridge that he wrote "The Lover's Tale," which was published in 1833, but immediately withdrawn, because the author felt "the imperfections of the poem;" but seeing that it was mercilessly pirated, and that what its author had deemed scarce worthy to live was not allowed to die, it was enlarged and completed and given to the public in 1879. In 1829 he gained the Chancellor's Medal for English verse, the subject being the apparently unpromising one of Timbuctoo.

The next flight of song is still of living interest, seeing that the best of what was then given to the world is contained in his published works under the head of "Juvenilia."

In 1830 Tennyson committed to the press the volume entitled "*Poems : Chiefly Lyrical.*" It contained fifty-three pieces, nearly half of which have been withdrawn, and those which the poet has permitted to remain have been touched and retouched again and again. In these poems we recognise at once the truth of Arthur Hallam's remark, "that there is a strange earnestness in Tennyson's worship of the beautiful." Everything is wrought in with pre-Raphaelite completeness of detail, and yet all is suffused by a rich, glowing, luxuriant imagination, so that the poet is no mere copyist. The whole is lifted into the region of pure art. It has been remarked by Professor Dowden that the beauty of Tennyson's work in some degree veils its strength. Roses do not stick like burrs, and yet the rose's loveliness is only "power garmented in beauty."

Those poems are the most powerful in which the whole effort is to give ideal expression to some profound thought or feeling. Take, for example, "*Mariana.*" The poem is founded on a few words taken from Shakespeare's "*Measure for Measure*," Act iii., Scene 1, "There at the moated grange resides this dejected Mariana." This lady had been forsaken by Angelo, because her marriage dowry had been accidentally lost, and Tennyson has entered by imaginative sympathy into her feeling of utter loneliness and desolation. The aim of the poem is to give

a word-picture of one forsaken and forlorn. The utter dreariness of the maiden's soul, who waits for one who does not come, holds the luxuriant fancy in check, and constrains it to the portrayal of this feeling. There is not a sentence, from the first line, that speaks of the black moss crusted upon the flower-pots, to the last cry, "Oh, God, that I were dead," which does not help to bring out the controlling emotion.

In this volume, written when the author was only twenty years of age, as we might expect, the pure love of beauty, and "rapturous satisfaction with the joy of its visions" are the prevailing features. But there are not lacking evidences of deeper things. I confess that the more I read these early poems, the more I marvel at their maturity of thought. "Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind" show that this youthful poet had already brooded deeply over those great spiritual problems with which, in after years, he would grapple with luminous insight. As his friend Hallam suggested, the mood portrayed in the poem was "rather the clouded season of a strong mind." It is the picture of a soul which has seen and felt the power and the beauty of religious faith, but, struck with a great wave of doubt, tosses and drifts upon a wild sea of unrest.

That he had already formed the highest ideal of

the poet's mission we know. The verses on "The Poet" bear witness to that. The volume was well received by all his friends—received, I might say, with enthusiasm by them. The *Westminster Review* ended a most appreciative criticism by expressing the hope that one possessed of such great gifts would prove true to his own lofty ideal of the poet's mission.

In the February of 1831 Tennyson hurried from Cambridge in consequence of the serious illness of his father, and he did not return again. His father died the following month (March 16th). That Dr. Tennyson filled a large place in the affections of his children, we know from the tender feeling with which our poet referred to him two years later in the lines addressed to J. S. (James Spedding).

Dr. Tennyson was buried in Somersby churchyard; but by a happy arrangement the old Rectory, with all its sweet and pathetic associations, remained the home of the widowed mother and children for a few years longer.

During the winter of 1832 our young poet published another volume of poems. It included most of the pieces now contained in his printed works under the title "The Lady Shalott, and other Poems." We find in it the same marvellous delicacy and refinement, the same elaboration, and delight

in the vision of beauty; but also a wider range of feeling, and deeper and richer thought. The necessary limits of this little book forbid anything more than a glance at one or two of the poems with the view of indicating the development of the poet's mind. This is, however, the less to be regretted, since the volume contains many of Tennyson's best known and best loved pieces, whose beauties every one can recognise. "The May Queen," "The Lotus-Eaters," "The Miller's Daughter," are universal favourites. The last of these poems is said to have been the first that attracted the notice of Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Albert. "The poetry of married life," says Dr. Peter Bayne, "is there expressed, perhaps, for the first time, and so well that it might be the last."¹

"The Palace of Art" indicates the high-water mark of Tennyson's thought at that period. It is to my mind one of the most significant poems ever written. It is an allegory, and is accompanied by an introduction which explains its meaning;—not that there is any difficulty in understanding the lesson from the poem itself—

"He that shuts Love out, in turn shall be
Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie
Howling in outer darkness."

¹ "Essays," p. 275.

"It is," says Henry Van Dyke, "an æsthetic protest against æstheticism."¹ Its aim is to exhibit in forms of perfect poetic beauty the hollowness and vanity of a life in which mere Culture, *Æstheticism*, Pleasure have taken the place of God, Humanity, Duty. A gifted soul breaks away from all the ties of religion, love, and charity, and goes to live in a palace by itself. The palace is one of matchless splendour, built upon a lofty crag-platform, far away from the common herd that range and breed in the plain below. Everything is constructed with the most rare and elaborate magnificence. Through the shining oriels the light falls in subdued tones, and in the midst of gorgeous loveliness the royal throne is placed, hung round with paintings of the wise and great, and there the proud spirit takes up her abode—

"My soul would live alone unto herself
In her high palace there."

Communing with herself, she cries—

"All these are mine,
And let the world have peace or war,
'Tis one to me."

In the midst of her splendour she reveals the utmost intellectual pride—

¹ "The Poetry of Tennyson."

“ I take possession of man’s mind and deed,
I care not what the sects may brawl ;
I sit as God, holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all.”

And then her absorption in selfish pleasure hardens into indifference for others, and lastly into cold, cruel contempt—

“ O God-like isolation which art mine,
I can but count thee perfect gain,
What time I watch the darkening droves of swine
That range on yonder plain.”

Now I ask, Is not that a true and vivid picture of what has ever been the spirit of those who have given themselves up to their own selfish enjoyment, to the neglect of duty and love, and all the sweet charities of life? It is the worship and glorification of self, as old as ancient Babylon, but ever appearing in new forms. And under all forms it comes, at last, to lose all sense of brotherhood, all pity for the weak and miserable, all sense of the duty and service which wealth and culture owe to those less fortunate. Even love and beauty are honoured only so far as they can minister to personal enjoyment. And Tennyson, although he conveys the truth in words of matchless music and in pictures of exquisite beauty, declares that this life of selfish pleasure is a cursed life, and can only end in hollow mockery,

disappointment, and madness. The joy of this proud sinful soul continued for three years, and then suddenly she fell, "struck through with pangs of hell"—

"Back on herself her serpent pride had curl'd,
 'No voice,' she shriek'd in that lone hall,
 'No voice breaks thro' the stillness of this world :
 One deep, deep silence all.'"

The reader will find it a very suggestive study to compare "The Palace of Art" with "The Poet's Vow" by Mrs. Browning. The central thought is the same, and although Mrs. Browning's poetry has not the exquisite music of Tennyson, she has worked out her idea not less powerfully. In one or two stanzas she strikes higher notes than are found in "The Palace of Art." "The Poet's Vow" is introduced with the significant quotation—

———"O be wiser thou,
 Instructed that true knowledge leads to love!"

The poem tells us that a poet determined to cut himself off from everything and everybody that could disturb the serenity of self-culture—

"Here me forswear man's sympathies,
 His pleasant yea and no,
 His riot on the piteous earth
 Whereon his thistles grow,
 His changing love—with stars above,
 His pride—with graves below."

He gives his wealth to his friends, urges his oldest friend to marry the lady to whom he himself was betrothed, whilst he goes away to a lonely castle, absorbed in the pursuit of culture. Before he departs his friend warns him of his fatal error—

“And thou, O distant, sinful heart,
That climbest up so high
To wrap and blind thee with the snows
That cause to dream and die,
What blessing can, from lips of man,
Approach thee with his sigh?”

The sequel is worked out with splendid power. Rosalind dies heart-broken by his cruel neglect, but loving him and praying for him to the last. She leaves a scroll to be put in her open coffin, which was to be laid at the door of the lonely castle. The proud self-sufficient man unbolts his door at midnight to view the sky. The soft light of the stars falls upon the face of the dead. He takes up the scroll and reads of all her love and prayers for himself, and then the heart, so long neglected in the ambitious pursuits of culture, asserts its claim, and in one loud wail of grief he falls upon the corpse. When they come at dawn of day to bear away the coffin, he is found lying dead beside it.

The spiritual meaning of each poem is essentially the same; but much may be learned from comparing the method of each writer.

Alfred Tennyson wrote his poem when he was not more than twenty-three, and yet to my mind it is one of the most powerful and original conceptions in literature. Here we are taught by one who had drunk deeply of the fountains of Art, that Art cannot take the place of Religion; that Culture, and Refinement, and Knowledge must not be put in the place of Love, Duty, Service. Is it not a lesson our age needs? Is there not an attempt in our midst to revive the old Babylonian principle of life, the principle which esteems fine gold more precious than a man, which seeks in some "enchanted world of refined and consummate pleasures" the joy which can only be found in the realisation of Christ's ideal of life? And yet, surely it is not wrong to passionately love beauty, music, art, culture. No; the sin was absorption in these; it was the sin of isolation and selfish exclusiveness, the sin of proud contempt for the ignorant and wretched. And therefore, with a fine reasonableness, the poet asks that the beautiful palace be not pulled down, for when the proud soul has purged away its guilt and learned the blessedness of self-sacrifice, then, perchance, it may return to its former home, for it will not go back alone.

III.

COLD WINDS OF DISCOURAGEMENT.

“And in the air there was a touch of cold.”

“ A paleness took the Poet's cheek :
‘ Must I drink *here* ? ’ he seemed to seek
The lady's will with utterance meek :

‘ Ay, ay, ’ she said, ‘ it so must be ; ’
(And this time she spake cheerfully),
‘ Behoves thee know *World's cruelty*. ’ ”

—E. B. BROWNING.

CHAPTER III.

COLD WINDS OF DISCOURAGEMENT.

“Once, in a golden hour,
I cast to earth a seed;
Up there came a flower,
The people said, a weed.”

It is desirable now to pause for a moment in order to look round and ask what heed the world was giving to this young singer. “The Poems by Two Brothers” attracted very little attention. Only one contemporary criticism has been unearthed. It appeared in the *Literary Chronicle* on May 19, 1827. “This little volume,” says the appreciative critic, “exhibits a pleasing union of kindred tastes, and contains several little pieces of considerable merit.” How far the boys were encouraged privately it is impossible to say. The venerable grandfather, it seems, had not changed his opinions regarding his grandson’s poetical gifts. He was told, “Your grandson, Alfred, has made a volume of poems,” and replied, “I had sooner have heard that he had made a wheelbarrow!”¹

¹ “The Laureate’s Country,” p. 63.

The prize poem on "Timbuctoo" (1829) received a remarkable notice in the *Athenæum* from the pen of John Sterling. The reviewer affirmed that the poem "indicated really first-rate poetic genius," and "would have done honour to any man that ever wrote." Arthur Hallam (who had also tried for the prize) wrote to W. E. Gladstone on September 14, 1829: "The splendid imaginative power that pervades it" (Tennyson's poem) "will be seen through all hindrances. I consider Tennyson as promising fair to be the greatest poet of our generation, perhaps of our century."

When the volume of 1830 ("Poems: Chiefly Lyrical") was published, it was welcomed with delight by the author's associates. The praise at the time seemed to many extravagant; but in the light of the poet's subsequent pre-eminence, we can now only look upon it as remarkable critical sagacity, recognising the elements of future greatness in the first efforts of genius. John Stuart Mill wrote a most appreciative criticism of it in the *Westminster Review*. Arthur Hallam did the same in the *Englishman's Magazine*. Several other writers of note also gave a sympathetic and encouraging welcome to the young poet.

But this chorus of praise could not be allowed without an emphatic disclaimer. Those who had spoken were only the generous friends of the author;

the real, authoritative voices of criticism had not yet been heard. It was high time they saved "Alfred" from his friends. The first to undertake this duty was Professor Wilson (Christopher North). He was a man of great gifts, possessing pathos, humour, and a wonderful power of wild, wanton, withering sarcasm, and at that time exercised an immense power in literary circles. But he was waging a deadly war against what he called the "Cockney School," and as he looked upon Tennyson as a disciple of that school, he assailed him in a truly athletic fashion. There is no need to recall all his violent abuse. It was the more unpardonable that he was not without insight into his victim's gifts. "I admire Alfred, and hope, nay, trust, that one day he will prove himself a poet." But this admiration did not restrain his truculent delight in heaping ridicule upon the young author. "Drivel, and more dismal drivel," "and even more dismal drivel," are the terms in which he expresses his scorn. The final blow from his tomahawk is administered in his criticism of "The Owl:"—

"Alfred is the greatest owl; all he wants is to be shot, stuffed, and stuck in a glass case, to be made immortal in a museum."

In defence of Wilson, the passages in which he speaks highly of his victim's work are often pointed out; but, of course, they are useless in the face of

all this scorn and bitterness. It is much more to the point to recall the fact that there were weaknesses and defects in Tennyson's early work which only too easily laid him open to the attacks of an enemy. And the most interesting fact about the whole assault now is, that the young poet recognised this, and, instead of breaking his heart over the ungenerous criticism, set himself earnestly to remedy the imperfections of his work. Nearly half the poems that appeared in 1830 have been suppressed, and those that have been retained have had their objectionable features removed. At the time, of course, Tennyson felt the injustice of the attack, and was provoked into the following retort, which, however, no longer appears among his published poems :—

“ You did late review my lays,
 Crusty Christopher ;
You did mingle blame and praise,
 Rusty Christopher.
When I learnt from whom it came,
I forgave you all the blame,
 Musty Christopher ;
I could not forgive the praise,
 Fusty Christopher.”

Wilson's criticism appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in May 1832. Six months after its appearance Tennyson published his second volume, and in July 1833 it was assailed by one of those monstrously unjust and malignant criticisms which were a dis-

grace to the literature of the period. It came out in the *Quarterly*,—"the hang, draw, and Quarterly," as it was rightly named, and James Gibson Lockhart, sometimes called "The Scorpion," because the sting of his writings was usually in their latter end, was believed to have written it. The article was clever, bitter, and utterly unscrupulous, and could have been written with no higher motive than to wound Tennyson, by holding his poems up to contempt and scorn. He opens fire in a tone of ironical compliment, regretting that he has not had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Tennyson's first volume, but proposing to atone for all his apparent neglect by introducing "to the admiration of our more sequestered readers a new prodigy of genius—another and brighter star of that galaxy or *milky way* of poetry of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger." He then proceeds, through many pages, to seize upon every weak expression, and hold it up with mock seriousness for admiration. He assures the poet that, "even after he is dead and buried, as much sense will still remain as he has now the good fortune to possess."

And yet malicious, unjust, and bitter as the criticism was, the writer was far too keen not to detect the defects of Tennyson's earlier work. The blemishes to which he pointed in mock praise were real blots upon the work, and the poet showed the

strength of his own character, that in the end he really profited more through the merciless treatment he received from his bitter critic than he did from the fervid admiration of his friends. No one would now think of justifying the spirit in which the *Quarterly Review* article was written; no one would venture to say that it was wise, fair, discriminating. It was one of those cruel blows which, had Tennyson not been a man conscious of his own powers and mission, might have crushed him. There can be no doubt that the rough treatment which Keats received from the same Review helped him into an untimely grave. But Tennyson had the strength and wisdom to profit by the attack, and thus he early learned the lesson, which all of us would do well to take to heart, that a man may often gain far more good from a candid, even an unjust and unscrupulous critic, than from all the adulation of his friends. And in this way we must mark this critic as "a slavish minister for good" in the life of Tennyson.

IV.

THE SHADOW FEARED OF MAN.

“In Vienna's fatal walls,
God's finger touch'd him, and he slept.”

"Peace, peace ! he is not dead, he doth not sleep !
He hath awakened from the dream of life.
'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife."

—SHELLEY.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW FEARED OF MAN.

“As we descended, following Hope,
There sat the shadow fear'd of man,
Who broke our fair companionship.”

IF the enthusiastic homage of noble minds is a true test of worth, then Arthur Henry Hallam, Tennyson's bosom friend at Cambridge, was one of the select few of the world's choice spirits. He died in 1833, before he had reached his twenty-third year; and yet men of the most brilliant gifts and culture deemed it a high privilege to enjoy his friendship, and when his beautiful life came to a sudden, and, as it seemed, untimely end, they mourned for him as for a beloved brother. Had we only the testimony of him who sung of his lost friend in words of imperishable pathos and stateliness, we might have thought that Hallam stood transfigured in a glory imparted by the singer. But all who approached him felt the wonderful spell of his noble character, and were deeply impressed with his remarkable gifts. His father said of him,

“He seemed to tread the earth as a spirit from some better world.” Mr. W. E. Gladstone, who in those far-away years was his schoolfellow at Eton, declared long ago that even then he was in a position to say—

“I marked him
As a far Alp ; and loved to watch the sunrise
Dawn on his ample brow.”

“Among those who were blessed with his friendship,” Mr. Gladstone goes on to say, “there was no one who did not feel at once bound closely to him by commanding affection and left far behind by the rapid growth and rich development of his ever-searching mind.” Richard Monckton Milnes (afterwards Lord Houghton) wrote: “I hold his kind words and earnest admonitions in the best part of my heart. I have his noble and tender letters by my side.” Henry Alford, the late Dean of Canterbury, whilst his memory was still green thus sung of him:—

“Gentle soul,
That ever moved among us in a veil
Of heavenly lustre ; in whose presence thoughts
Of common import shone with light divine,
Whence we drew sweetness as from out a well
Of honey pure and deep ; thine early form
Was not the investiture of daily men,
But thou didst wear a glory in thy look

From inward converse with the spirit of love ;
And thou hadst won in the first strife of youth
Trophies that gladdened hope and pointed on
To days when we should stand and minister
To the full triumphs of thy gathered strength."

It is well that we can supplement "In Memoriam" with these remarkable testimonies to the unique beauty and strength of Hallam's character. They invest the "In Memoriam" with a new interest and charm. They assure us that the bereaved poet did not yield to loving exaggeration. The imperishable and exquisite lines which embalm his grief for his lost friend gain an added preciousness, for they are not only the most pathetic and stately music ever offered at the shrine of friendship, but they also throw a true and clear light upon him of whom the poet sings.

It was to this man, so universally beloved and honoured, that Tennyson became bound by one of those rare friendships which shine, in an age of polished indifference and artificial sentiment, like the calm and stately stars above the shifting and uncertain lights of the earth.

Arthur Hallam was born in 1811, and was therefore more than a year younger than Alfred Tennyson. But his opportunities had been great, and his mind, also, by its own native force, unfolded its rare powers very early. His father was Henry

Hallam, the celebrated historian, and lived in London. Twice whilst still a boy Arthur Hallam had stayed with his parents in Italy and Switzerland for some months, where he had made himself perfectly familiar with French and Italian, and then, after a brilliant career at Eton, where, however, he showed more preference for English literature and modern culture generally than for the old classical learning, he proceeded to Cambridge. Never very strong, he did not attempt any of the University honours. But his great gifts and charming spirit were speedily recognised, and drew around him the choicest minds in the University. He was a sympathetic and earnest student of modern literature and contemporary thought, and a most engaging speaker. A society called "The Apostles," because its number was restricted to twelve, was formed. Weekly meetings were held in Hallam's rooms for free discussion, and it was considered a mark of distinction to be one of its members. We get glimpses in "In Memoriam" of these delightful meetings and of the attractiveness of Hallam. See especially Cantos lxxxvii., cix., and cx.

In the lines addressed to W. H. Brookfield there is this pathetic reference to Hallam—

"How oft with him we paced that walk of limes
Him, the lost light of those dawn golden times,
Who loved you well ! Now both are gone to rest."

It is clear that Tennyson's love and appreciation of his friend were amply reciprocated. Hallam was one of the first to recognise his friend's exceptional gifts. "If," says Dr. Alexander H. Japp, "Tennyson saw in Arthur Hallam powers which exceeded his own, so that he was ever learning from him, Arthur Hallam saw also the power and the promise of greatness in his friend. On one occasion, when he had accompanied Tennyson to his native home, he remarked of the house that many in future times would make pilgrimages to it to behold where a great poet was born; which attests a remarkable insight in so forecasting a companion's future."¹ We are told by Hallam's father that it was the intention of these two friends to publish their poems together.

In 1832 Arthur Hallam graduated and left Cambridge. He went to reside with his father at 67 Wimpole Street, London, the dark house in the long unlovely street, the number of which he used in his humorous way to impress on the minds of his friend by saying, "You know you will always find us at sixes and sevens." He was intended for the law, and entered at the Inner Temple.

But although thus divided from Tennyson, their friendship had become cemented in a very beautiful way. I will let his own letter to Trench, afterwards

¹ "The Poets and Poetry of the Century," p. 106.

Archbishop of Dublin, tell its own tale: "I am now at Somersby, not only as the friend of Alfred Tennyson, but as a lover of his sister. An attachment on my part of near two years' standing, and a mutual engagement of one year, are, I fervently hope, only the commencement of a union which circumstances may not impair, and the grave itself not conclude."

Many are the glimpses we get in "In Memoriam" of those delightful vacations spent at the old Rectory of Somersby. Here is a scene on the garden lawn:—

"Wich-elms that counterchange the floor
Of this flat lawn with dusk and bright ;
And thou with all thy breadth and height
Of foliage, towering sycamore ;

How often, hither wandering down,
My Arthur found your shadows fair,
And shook to all the liberal air
The dust and din and steam of town.

He brought an eye for all he saw ;
He mixt in all our simple sports ;
They pleased him, fresh from brawling courts
And dusty purlieus of the law."¹

But the reader must turn to the poem itself to realise all its beauties.

But an awful shadow was about to fall upon all

¹ Canto lxxxix.

this ideal beauty and happiness. For this sweet circle of gracious friends the whole world was about to be changed, darkened, charged with sorrow and anguish. A message would suddenly reach them which would sweep away all this ideal peace and shake life to its foundations, and fill their souls for a season with sharp conflicts and doubts. In one black moment the whole beauteous vision would shrink up and disappear, and in its place would stand the awful shadow feared of man. Arthur Hallam had never been strong; he had suffered from a determination of blood to the brain. During his residence, however, at Cambridge he had improved; the symptoms of a deranged circulation had disappeared, and although he often suffered from pains in the head, his friends thought they were only ordinary headaches. In the autumn of 1833 he accompanied his father on a Continental tour; but on returning to Vienna from Pesth, a wet day gave him a slight fever. The end was very sad, and left in many hearts a sorrow that could not soon be put aside. The father had been out for a walk in the streets of Vienna, and coming back, found his son lying on the sofa. Supposing that he was only taking a short rest, he sat down by his side to write his letters; and then by slow and imperceptible degrees the strange stillness of Arthur began to awaken a certain anxiety in his mind.

Drawing near to see why he did not move or speak,
he found that all was over—

“In Vienna’s fatal walls,
God’s finger touch’d him, and he slept.”

“Those,” wrote the broken-hearted father, “whose eyes must long be dim with tears brought him home to rest among his kindred and in his own country.” He died on the 15th of September 1833, but it was not until the 3rd of January 1834 that his remains were laid to rest in the chancel of Clevedon Church, “a lovely spot hanging on the side of a hill overlooking the Bristol Channel.”

This was the great sorrow that broke in upon the sweet peace of Tennyson’s life, and shattered for ever every inclination to rest satisfied with the vision and worship of beauty. It was this blow that raised for him all the deepest and most awful questions the human soul can face—the worth and meaning of life, the reality of God and immortality; questions which the poet faced with reverence and yet with courage through dark lonely years of silence and suffering, and by the answer to which, found through faith in the “Strong Son of God,” he was able to pierce the mist of tears, and to see the grave of his beloved friend arched with a rainbow of immortal hope.

V.

DARKNESS AND SILENCE.

“Proffering the riddles of the dread unknown,
Like the calm Sphinxes, with their eyes of stone,
Questioning the centuries from their veils of sand.”

—WHITTIER.

“ We demand
To know Him first, then trust Him, and then love,
When we have found Him worthy of our love,
Tried by our own poor hearts, and not before :
He must be truer than the truest friend,
He must be tenderer than a woman's love,
A father better than the best of sires ;
Kinder than she who bore us, though we sin
Oftener than did the brother we are told,
We—poor ill-tempered mortals—must forgive,
Though seven times sinning threescore times and ten.”

—O. W. HOLMES.

CHAPTER V.

DARKNESS AND SILENCE.

"But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still."

THE great movement of thought begun in the eighteenth century, and still in its full onward sweep amongst us, has been described by one who has studied it with penetrating insight as a progress "through negation to reaffirmation," through destruction to reconstruction,—in Carlyle's language, through the "Everlasting No" to the "Everlasting Yea."¹ It is seen "mirrored" in the spiritual history of our greatest thinkers. Its representatives in Germany are Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Goethe. In this country such names as Coleridge, Thomas Arnold, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Maurice, Tennyson, indicate its progress and some of its characteristic features.

All these men felt the inadequacy of the old formulas to meet modern problems. With varying success they attempted some re-statement of the spiritual truths and hopes on which man's higher

¹ "Hegel," by Professor Edward Caird.

life depends. They help us because they courageously faced and laid the grim spectres and doubts from which others only turned away in terror. Through all their conflict with traditionalism they retained their faith in man's spiritual nature and destiny. They saw that the shallow rationalism of the past had no adequate answer for the new scientific materialism; that it only starved man's higher nature, and dried up the divine fountains of poetry, and left no worthy place for religion. They sought an explanation of the universe which was large enough to embrace all ascertained facts, and which would not leave out God, Duty, and Immortality.

A vast spiritual movement like this necessarily involves much suffering. It is easy to misunderstand it. Some will dread it; some will yield to it; many will only recognise isolated features of its striving elements. Men look on the old foundations as they crumble away; they often do not see the new edifice rising from a more substantial base. And thus for all earnest men a period of transition is one of darkness, conflict, silence. It is the critical moment of their lives. There is danger of becoming a mere destroyer or a mere reactionary. The noblest issue is that which succeeds, by way of a deeper insight, in reconciling the new culture with all that is helpful and true in the old faith.

We have now reached the period in the life of

Lord Tennyson in which these considerations are of special interest. We may be sure that under any circumstances he would have been profoundly influenced by the great intellectual movement of his age. After the death of Arthur Hallam he stood outwardly where he was before, but inwardly he was changed. We have almost nothing of a directly biographical character to guide us, with respect to this period. For ten years he preserved an almost unbroken silence. He had few friends and lived very much alone. Our best hope of knowing anything of the development of his mind during those lonely and silent years is from the poems he afterwards published; and of these, I think that "The Two Voices" and "In Memoriam" give us the best clue. But it must be borne in mind that whilst "The Two Voices" appeared in 1842, in the first volume that broke the long silence, "In Memoriam" did not appear until 1850, eight years later, and that, therefore, we may expect to find a maturity of thought in it which we do not discover in the earlier poem. I shall, in this chapter, only refer to "In Memoriam" in so far as it gives a fuller statement of ideas which we find in germ in "The Two Voices," and so helps us to understand the way in which our poet faced the doubts that haunted him.

We see at once that Arthur Hallam's death burst upon him like an earthquake, and shook his life to

its foundations. Hitherto his life, on the whole, had been one of ideal peace. He had faced the future in confidence and hope. He knew that an exceptional gift had been bestowed upon him, and that he was consecrated to a great mission. In "The Two Voices" the bright visions of those early days are referred to.

He expresses the ardent wish that he could recover the hopes that warmed in the days when he longed for the praise of men; that he had still the courage and joy of the years when, "wide in soul and bold of tongue," he sung the clear pæan among the tents, and waited for the hour when he would be summoned to wage a noble strife with falsehood and wrong.

Contrast that with the later cry which came from his heart after he had been called to face the insoluble, hard problems of existence—

". . . But what am I?
An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry."

It is evident, I think, that up to the death of Hallam he had not been severely smitten with the "malady of doubt," although, as we learn from the "Supposed Confessions," it had not been wholly absent from his mind. He had just the nature, deep,

brooding, metaphysical, to feel the full pressure of the intellectual unrest of the age. And, as we might expect, the shock of profound grief brought him face to face with "the eternal problems in all their implacable solemnity." What took place during those ten years we may perhaps never fully know; but when he does appear again and breaks the silence, we know that he has suffered. He has been in the wilderness of temptation. The scars are on him. He comes forth like the silver shield borne by the Red Cross Knight—

"Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
The cruell marks of many a bloody field."

The only adequate reason for this long silence, as it seems to me, is that there was spiritual trouble. The suggestion that he was disappointed with the reception of his work so far, and had resolved to commit nothing more to the press until he had remedied his defects of style, will not bear examination. No one was better able than himself to see the weakness as well as the strength of the attack made upon him. It is not credible that that could have silenced him for ten years. It was the blow that fell upon him in 1833 that caused the silence. "Bound to Hallam by one of those rare friendships passing the love of women, Tennyson felt his loss in the inmost fibres of his being. The world was

changed, darkened, filled with secret conflicts. 'The importunate questions of human life and destiny thronged upon his soul.'¹ 'This private loss drew to itself the age-long agony of the world; it started all the hard, stony, Sphinx-like problems that have confronted men as they have faced the wrongs and miseries of the world. But he met it all manfully. As Professor Dowden says: "'Tennyson did not, like Newman, silence his doubts and still his troubles as a weary child in the old blind nurse's lap.'" He neither surrendered his spiritual freedom and the mighty hopes that make us men; nor did he hide himself away, afraid to look at the cold, ruthless assaults that were made upon them.

"He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
He would not make his judgment blind;
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own."

Only twice during those years did he break the silence, and then under great pressure. In 1837 he contributed the exquisite poem "St. Agnes" to *The Keepsake*, edited by Lady Wortley, and the same year to *The Tribute*, edited by Lord Northampton, he sent the stanzas—

¹ "The Poetry of Tennyson," by H. Van Dyke, p. 75.

“O that ’twere possible,
After long grief and pain ;”

in the following lines of which there may be an echo of personal feeling :—

“Ah Christ, that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be.”

When we turn to “The Two Voices” and “In Memoriam,” we get clear indications of what the “spectres of the mind” were that had to be laid during those years. There is hardly any acute form of modern doubt and scepticism not presented. They pass before us—the apparent insignificance of man’s life in the presence of the boundless wealth of the universe ; the seeming lordship of death ; the unattainableness of truth ; the hideous denials which Nature and the outward senses appear to give to our divinest beliefs and hopes—there they are, presented with all the vivid power of a magnificent mind which has fought and conquered them one and all, but which has felt the awful bitterness of the struggle.” “‘The Two Voices,’” says Dr. Bayne, “is a poem perhaps unique. It is in the highest sense philosophic, nay, metaphysical, throughout ; yet no lyrical trill of undiluted melody, no lilt sung by village maiden, was ever more purely and entirely poetical.”¹

¹ “Essays,” by Dr. Peter Bayne, p. 252.

The poem is a dialogue, at first carried on between a man who refuses to part with his faith and hope although in deep misery, and an evil spirit of denial and despair, a Mephistopheles, and afterwards between the same man and the good spirit that bears witness to the hidden hope of the world.

“ A still small voice spaké unto me,
‘Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?’ ”

The suggestion of Mephistopheles is that the soul in sorrow should curse God and die. But the sufferer refuses to do this, and expresses his belief in the value of his life, and in the essential dignity and greatness of man. But the Spirit of Despair bids him look up through the night and consider whether in the presence of those hundred million spheres man's petty life can be of any worth. The man expresses his desire for truth, but he is told that it is unattainable. The riddle of the earth cannot be solved; men merely play with knowledge; they seek, but find not; they are no nearer the light, for the scale is infinite. It were better to die; there is repose in the grave. “Consider,” says the Spirit of Despair, “the face of one who has but lately died. Is it not strangely calm and meek? There are no signs of passion, or pain, or pride. His hands are folded across his breast, and nothing is

suggested but that all disquiet is merged in everlasting rest."

But the sufferer will not yield. These arguments of scientific Materialism and Agnosticism; these proofs of the worthlessness of life, the relativity of knowledge, the triumph of death, may be subtle, they may confuse, bewilder; the evidence of Nature and the senses may be all on their side, but they do not convince. There is that in *man's nature* that protests against them all, and refuses to believe them. Men will not believe that knowledge is all a dream, that the dead are dead, that the soul is only dust.

"Here sits he shaping wings to fly :
His heart forebodes a mystery :
He names the name Eternity.

He seems to hear a Heavenly Friend,
And through thick veils to apprehend
A labour working to an end.

Ah ! sure within him and without,
Could his dark wisdom find it out,
There must be answer to his doubt."

Now what is the significance of this poem thus far? I think this: That when, in the agony of suffering and loss, the poet was pressed by scientific and philosophic unbelief to surrender his spiritual faith and hopes, he, in the first instance, fell back *on the soul's deepest affections and experiences*. In

his own nature he discovered a witness for God, Duty, Immortality. The principle hinted at in "The Two Voices," and more clearly expressed in the "In Memoriam," is that man's moral and spiritual nature bears a more direct and certain relation to the ultimate realities of the universe than the logical understanding and the witness of the senses; and that, therefore, it is to its voice we should specially give heed.

But this remarkable poem takes us a step further. There is nothing more that the spirit of denial can urge, and it takes its departure, saying—

"In quiet scorn,
'Behold, it is the Sabbath morn.'"

The sweet church-bells begin to peal, and the people press to the house of God, passing the graves where each must rest, without any terror. And now another voice whispers silver clear, a murmur, "Be of better cheer."

"'What is't thou know'st, sweet voice?' I cried.
'A hidden hope,' the voice replied ;

*So heavenly-toned, that in that hour
From out my sullen heart a power
Broke like the rainbow from the shower.*

*To feel, altho' no tongue can prove,
That every cloud that spreads above,
And veileth love, itself is love."*

In other words, as I understand the poem, it not merely teaches that our deepest feelings and experiences are true witnesses to our spiritual nature, and immortal destiny; but that the witness of the heart is confirmed by the Gospel, as symbolised in the Sabbath-morn and the house of God; and also by that good spirit which is not withheld from all true seekers. And then further, that their united witness, when rightly interpreted, is that the *ultimate reality* of the universe is "Immortal Love." These are the great underlying truths of "In Memoriam," as I shall endeavour to show later on.

But the reader will discover a depth and beauty in "The Two Voices" that cannot be possibly pointed out here. Every line in the poem is worthy of careful thought; and here, as in the case of "The Palace of Art," it is an advantage to compare it with a similar poem by another author. There is not anything like the same depth of splendour in Whittier's poem "The Voices" as in the one we have just been considering, but yet it is a beautiful poem and the two have much in common both in matter and style. The poems throw light on one another. In Whittier's "Voices," a soul weary of the good fight of faith is urged by a spirit of evil to give over the struggle—

"Why urge the long, unequal fight,
Since Truth has fallen in the street."

The light of sun and stars has left the sky, and the soul in darkness is inclined to give heed to the tempter. But then another voice is heard. It acknowledges that the task may seem over-hard to scatter the life-seed in so thankless a soil—

“Yet do thy work ; it shall succeed
In thine or in another’s day ;
And, if denied the victor’s meed,
Thou shalt not lack the toiler’s pay.”

This poem also, like Tennyson’s, ends with the sweet Sabbath-morn breaking in sunlight and beauty over the world after a week of storms.

And now we can understand how it is that for the past fifty years Lord Tennyson has exercised such a vast influence over the minds of educated Englishmen. For this period has been one of spiritual distress for very many. Menacing figures have arisen on all sides to confront the beliefs and hopes on which our higher life depends. The fundamental postulates of morality and religion have been assailed with an earnestness and ability unknown before. And, moreover, there are so often times of darkness and sorrow, when they seem too beautiful to be true. But through all this unrest, here was one who had sympathy with all *honest* doubt, who had himself felt the whole pressure and agony of the present distress, and who had

courageously battled his way through the "Everlasting No" to the "Everlasting Yea." Whilst, therefore, Lord Tennyson showed the utmost scorn for the shallow scepticism that delights to parade itself, and which deems it a fine thing to look down on men of faith, he knew that doubt was sometimes a duty, that it might be the dark and painful path to a larger and clearer faith—

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds."

And yet Tennyson did not rest satisfied with doubt. He fought against it, and saw clearly that Faith was man's birthright. He looked upon all these spiritual struggles as the efforts of a living faith to clear itself of all that would hinder its growth. Faith is the keynote of much of his teaching—faith which is not the mere assent of the understanding to a series of propositions in a book, but which is born of obedience, reverence, patience, moral fidelity—

"The faith that comes of self-control,
The truths that never can be proved."



VI.

SUNSHINE AND SONG AGAIN.

“ When comforts are declining,
He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining,
To cheer it after rain.”

—COWPER.

“ Through every fibre of my brain,
Through every nerve, through every vein,
I feel the electric thrill, the touch
Of life, that seems almost too much.

And over me unrolls on high
The splendid scenery of the sky,
Where through a sapphire sea the sun
Sails like a golden galleon.

O Life and Love ! O happy throng
Of thoughts, whose only speech is song !
O heart of man ! canst thou not be
Blithe as the air is, and as free ? ”

—LONGFELLOW.

CHAPTER VI.

SUNSHINE AND SONG AGAIN.

“The clouds will melt and vanish,
The golden light will stream,
And the freshen'd earth with fragrance
And melody will teem.”—THOS. LYNCH.

WE know little of the outward movements of Tennyson during the period covered by the last chapter; but we do get one or two glimpses of him, and, as they help to confirm the view I have taken of his inner life during those years of darkness and silence, and lead up most naturally to the next stage, they may be recorded here.

In 1835 the dear old home at Somersby Rectory, so full of gracious memories, and where he sung his matin song, was abandoned with many regrets. See “In Memoriam,” Cantos ci. and cii.

“We leave the well-beloved place
Where first we gazed upon the sky;
The roofs that heard our earliest cry
Will shelter one of stranger race.”

He moved about from place to place, living, however, for the most part in the neighbourhood of

London. Friends were few, but they were choice. Among them was Thomas Carlyle, who, says Mr. Froude, "admired and almost loved him." They had many tastes in common, took long walks together, and often, like the divinities of the old world, sat "among the clouds"—of their own tobacco-smoke. Carlyle, who was not usually lavish in praise of his contemporaries, spoke in high terms of Tennyson. Here is a striking word-picture of him. It was written in 1844, but manifestly describes Tennyson as he appeared all through those years. It forms part of a letter to Emerson. "Alfred is one of the few British and foreign figures (a not increasing number, I think) who are and remain beautiful to me—a true human soul, or some authentic approximation thereto, to whom your own soul can say, Brother! . . . A man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom—carrying a bit of Chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into Cosmos. . . . Being master of a small annuity on his father's decease, he preferred clubbing with his mother and some sisters, to live unpromoted and write poems. In this way he still lives, now here, now there, the family always within reach of London, never in it; he himself making rare and brief visits, lodging in some old comrade's rooms. . . . One of the finest-looking men in the world. A great shock of rough dusty-dark

hair ; bright, laughing, hazel eyes ; massive aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate ; of sallow-brown complexion, almost Indian-looking ; clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy ; smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical metallic—fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between ; speech and speculation free and plenteous. I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe ! We shall see what he will grow to. He is often unwell ; very chaotic—his way is through Chaos and the Bottomless and Pathless ; not handy for making out many miles upon.” Three years later we get another sentence from the pen of Carlyle, worth a whole volume from one of less penetration : “Tennyson has been here for three weeks . . . a truly interesting son of earth and son of heaven, who has almost lost his way amongst will-o’-the-wisps, I doubt ; and may flounder ever deeper.”

By these brief visits to London, of which Carlyle speaks, he kept in touch with many of his old Cambridge friends, and would, of course, always be a welcome guest with the Hallams. But for the most part he lived a lonely life. “Avoiding general society,” said another contemporary, “he would prefer to sit up all night with a friend, or else sit and think alone. Beyond a very small circle he is never met.” Thus alone and silent he fought his doubts.

In one respect, however, Carlyle's picture, or rather his fears, did not come true. Tennyson did not "flounder ever deeper." As we saw in the last chapter, the Chaos was becoming a Cosmos. Already the sun had broken through the dense clouds that had encompassed it, and was throwing broad beams of light upon his path.

In this experience we see how truly Tennyson represented his age. When in sad and sweet music he told the story of his own spiritual unrest, the thoughts of many hearts were revealed. The "In Memoriam" and "The Two Voices" have been like solemn chants interpreting the hidden secrets of a great multitude of souls. For the eternal problems spring up in every life, and there is no noble escape from them but *through* them. Each one must bear his own burden, and fight his own fight of faith, and win his own way to victory. And, as with Tennyson, so with us all, the victory must be won before we can live our best life. I do not mean that we must see our way to a complete system of theology or theory of the universe; but I do mean that a man must know that he has got his feet upon the rock of Eternal Truth if he is to enjoy spiritual freedom and do noble work in the world. "It is with man's soul," says Thomas Carlyle, "as it is with Nature: the beginning of Creation is—Light. Till the eye have vision, the whole members are in

bonds. Divine moment when over the tempest-tost soul, as once over the wild-weltering chaos, it is spoken: Let there be Light!"

And so for our poet there came the divine moment when the clouds rolled away and the sun shone again. The "Everlasting No" gave place to the "Everlasting Yea." Even the grave was seen to have its "sunny side." Regret died, but love lived for evermore. His soul was no longer anchored to gloomy thoughts. The word was spoken—*Let there be light!*

But life needs a threefold benediction—Light, Labour, Love.

We have seen how Tennyson emerged into light; let us see how the other gifts came to him.

In 1842 the long silence was broken by the publication of his poems in two volumes. They contained the earlier poems—long out of print—together with most of those now grouped in his works under the heading "English Idylls, and other Poems." They were received at once with almost universal applause and satisfaction, and soon ran through several editions. Now, for the *first time*, there was a distinct, popular, voluntary confirmation of the choice of his youth. He was a poet by divine ordination, by self-consecration, by the deliberate verdict of his contemporaries. The clouds of obscurity and neglect rolled away, and life's great blessing of noble

Labour came to him in the call to be the poet-prophet of his age.

Everywhere men felt that a voice was speaking to them to which it was well to give heed. There was the same music in it as in the early poems, the same delicacy of tone ; but it was richer, deeper, more pathetic. It was the voice of one who had suffered ; who had been down into the Valley of the Shallow of Death and heard whispering Spirits of Evil, and fought with Apollyon himself, but who had conquered, and gained at last the fields of light beyond the awful gorge. Life had become real and earnest. The poet had found his true work. He was called to be the Teacher, Prophet, Poet of his age ; to speak a message of hope to all in spiritual distress ; of sympathy to all that was pure, sweet, lovely ; of scorn for all social lies and tyrannies that were destroying the souls of men. The reader will see, on referring to his works, that many of his best known and best loved poems were contained in these volumes. The foremost men in literature were now enthusiastic in his praise ; his popularity and influence increased daily. The venerable Wordsworth, then Poet Laureate, had an interview with him, and wrote, saying, "He is decidedly the first of living poets, and I hope will live and give the world still better things." Thackeray became his intimate friend. Charles Dickens read his poems with admiration, and never faltered

in his allegiance. The volumes were cordially welcomed in America, and Lowell, Longfellow, Poe, and others expressed their deep sense of the greatness of the author.

But although Tennyson had found his work, it did not bring him in much pecuniary help for some time. It brought him honour and gratitude, but not the less was there much anxiety about the bread that perisheth. But this led a number of his friends to make an effort to secure a pension for him, so that he might serve the nation by devoting himself to his high mission with less worry about

“That eternal want of pence
Which vexes public men.”

In this they were successful; but not without provoking a very ungenerous attack from Bulwer Lytton, who styled him “Miss Alfred,” the “puling muse” who gave the world a “jingling medley of purloined conceits.” The attack was retaliated, but afterwards the quarrel was healed. The poem called “Literary Squabbles” refers to the incident.

In 1847 “The Princess” was published. It has been called by a sympathetic critic a “splendid failure.” It contains much exquisite poetry, and above all the immortal stanzas beginning—

“Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair.”

All poets have sung of Love, but none in nobler strains than Lord Tennyson. It occupies a central position in his conception of a true life and in his writings. "Locksley Hall," "The Miller's Daughter," "The Gardener's Daughter," "Maud," "The Princess," "Aylmer's Field," "Enoch Arden," "The Lover's Tale," "Lady Clare," "The Lord of Burleigh," are only a few of the poems in which love and marriage form the theme. And from whatever point of view he approaches these subjects, whether he is tracing the fatal course of those unhallowed passions which wrought such havoc in King Arthur's Court and blasted all his divine ideals, or is portraying the sinful pride and mammon-worship that wrecked the hopes of the hero of Locksley Hall and swept away the glory of Aylmer's field, or is sketching the tender interviews of happy lovers in the

" Woods where we hid from the wet,
Stiles where we stay'd to be kind,"

or is withdrawing the veil from a picture of perfect marriage bliss, his sympathies are ever the same. His ideals are pure and chaste; his words stir up no bad passions. In an age which has been flooded with the loathsome confessions of the divorce court, in which much of literature is but thinly-veiled vice, in which many desire to reinstate the worship of the flesh, and glorify lust rather than self-restraint, it

has been an unspeakable blessing that the poet, who for more than fifty years has been our most distinguished man of literature, has spoken no single word to excuse or encourage vice. All his teaching has been pervaded by a noble and lofty chivalry, a profound and delicate reverence for womanhood, and an utter scorn and hatred of the evil passions that defile the pure white garments of love.

In his poems true men are brave, chaste knights, who hold all their passions under firm control; who are resolved

“To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her.”

And so with woman. He never departed from the ideal of his youth expressed in “Isabel”—

“The stately flower of female fortitude,
Of perfect wifhood and pure lowlihead.”

In the teaching of Tennyson love is the sweet fountain from which flows all that is most beautiful and worthy in the life of man and woman. It is the divinely-implanted principle of redemption and healing in society, that keeps down the base, and stirs man to all that is unselfish, heroic, resourceful in his life. Notice how this idea is worked out in

“Enoch Arden,” and “The Miller’s Daughter,” and “Locksley Hall.”

And love, pure, chaste, noble, finds its consummation in marriage. In union with woman, “woman as God made her and meant her to be,” woman as she is in the true purity and unspoiled beauty of her nature, man was to find a primary condition of an efficient and noble life.

“But were I joined with her,
Then might we live together as one life,
And, reigning with one will in everything,
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live.”

These are the ideas that find expression all through his poetry. They form the fitting end of “The Princess.” For dealing with the vexed question of what has been called “the emancipation of woman,” it ends in the recognition of the truth that woman finds her true place when she comes to

“Set herself to man,
Like perfect music unto noble words ;”

and finally ends in the Prince marrying the Princess. This was Lord Tennyson’s teaching, and he carried it out in his own noble life. The remark was made at the time of his death that “many poets have been inferior men, but he was equal to his writing.”¹

¹ The *Spectator*, October 8, 1892.

Through a long life it was proved that a woman did not necessarily make a mistake in "marrying a man of genius."

There is no romantic story to tell regarding the poet's courtship and marriage. The veil has very rightly been closely drawn over his domestic life. But what glimpses we have been permitted to get of it confirm the statement that it was one of ideal happiness, grace, beauty. It has been said that he would have been married earlier but for pecuniary reasons. Lady Tennyson was Emily Sellwood, eldest daughter of Mr. Henry Sellwood of Horncastle, the little county town not far from the 'old home of the Tennysons. He came of a good family of Berkshire and Somersetshire squires, but became a solicitor and settled in Lincolnshire. He married a sister of Sir John Franklin, the celebrated Arctic navigator, and they had three daughters, the youngest being married to Charles Tennyson, whilst Emily, the eldest, was married to our poet on June 13, 1820, in the fine old church of Shiplake, near to Henley-on-Thames.

That the union was a beautiful realisation of his own ideal of married bliss we know; for he has told us in the words—

"Dear, near and true—no truer Time himself
Can prove you, tho' he make you evermore
Dearer and nearer, as the rapid of life
Shoots to the fall."

VII.

MERIDIAN SPLENDOUR.

“Summer suns are glowing
Over land and sea ;
Happy light is flowing,
Bountiful and free.”

—W. W. How.

“ What are we set on earth for? Say, to toil;
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o’ the day, till it declines,
And Death’s mild curfew shall from work assoil.
God did anoint thee with His odorous oil,
To wrestle, not to reign.”—E. B. BROWNING.

CHAPTER VII.

MERIDIAN SPLENDOUR.

“The sun is high in heaven, the skies are bright
And full of blessedness,
And every hour brings its own burden sweet.”

—LEWIS MORRIS.

TENNYSON'S genius now quickly mounted to the zenith of its power. The clouds dispersed. The gloom that overshadowed his early manhood melted away before the warmth of a deeper spiritual faith and the profound peacefulness of marriage bliss. For a long series of years his life became one of great literary activity and brilliancy, and he enjoyed an ever-widening recognition. The year of his marriage witnessed the publication of the work which very many consider his greatest achievement, and certainly the one by which he has most deeply influenced his age. In this year, also, the eyes of men turned to him as the one poet most worthy to wear the laurel that had just fallen from the ample brows of Wordsworth. He was made Poet Laureate on November 19, 1850.

For the first few years their home was at Twickenham, but they travelled a good deal. A few months after their marriage Thomas Carlyle met them in Cumberland, and from his pen we get a bright little picture of the poet's "new wife." "Mrs. Tennyson lights up bright glittering blue eyes when you speak to her; has wit, has sense, and were it not that she seems so very delicate in health, I should augur really well of Tennyson's adventure." The autumn of 1851 was spent in France and Italy. We turn, however, as the poet would have wished us to do (see the verses addressed "To —— after reading a Life and Letters") from these small details to the consideration of one of the greatest productions of human genius.

"IN MEMORIAM."

"In Memoriam" is something more than the greatest religious poem of the nineteenth century; it is the one poem worthy of being placed by the side of Dante's "Divina Commedia" and Milton's "Paradise Lost." It has been beautifully described as—

"A light that gleams across the wave
Of darkness, down the rolling years,
Piercing the heavy mist of tears,—
A rainbow shining o'er the grave." '

Death had come between Arthur Hallam and

Alfred Tennyson, who, as we have seen, were bound together by one of those noble friendships of which the world affords but rare examples. But the poet did not strike his harp in a wild outburst of passionate grief. That might have awakened pity—it would not have elevated or healed. For seventeen years he bore his sorrow in silence, and when he made it known to the world, it still retained a look of earnest, endless sadness; but it was sadness transfigured in angel-like beauty through the light of Christian faith and hope. It was sorrow, calm, majestic, holy. The shadow was glory-crowned. From the depths of the agony there arose a note of jubilation. For springing out of this personal bereavement “*In Memoriam*” sweeps into the presence of the eternal realities. It confronts the ghastliest fears that have ever haunted sorrow-stricken men and women as they have looked on the white faces of their dead. And it is only after all the depths of doubt have been sounded that it goes on to assert an unshaken belief that love is Lord and King, and that beyond the shadow there is an immortal life where the fair friendships of earth will be renewed.

“*In Memoriam*,” therefore, deals with themes of solemn, universal interest. For the shadow falls everywhere. The supreme mystery of death faces us on all sides. The air is full of farewells to the dying and mourning for the dead—

“There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there :
There is no fireside, howsoe’er defended,
But has one vacant chair !”

Only one condition was required to make “In Memoriam” of profound and pathetic interest to us all ; it must deal with its great theme adequately, in a way suited to the spiritual conditions of the age.

It is an exceedingly common thing to compare “In Memoriam” with Milton’s “Lycidas” and Shelley’s “Adonais ;” but in truth they have hardly anything in common beyond the fact that they are elegies. Nothing, however, can more impress upon us the greatness of “In Memoriam” than to read the other two poems in connection with it. There is no very profound grief in “Lycidas ;” for Edward King, who was drowned, and of whom Milton sings, had not been a very close friend. And beyond the expression of the belief that although he had “sunk so low,” he had yet—

“Mounted high
Through the dear might of Him that walk’d the waves,”

there is very little in it of Christian hope. The beautiful “Adonais,” in which Shelley laments the early death of Keats, has much passion and pathos in it. It could not, of course, coming from Shelley, have in it any glorious expressions of faith. But

there are passages of marvellous loveliness. How perfectly, for example, the following lines suggest the ruthlessness of death, and the fragile, unsubstantial beauty of life, compared with the changeless perfection and permanence of eternity :—

“Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.”

But, beautiful as this poem is, it is not to be compared with “*In Memoriam*.” Tennyson drew his inspiration from the profound depths of Christian faith and hope.

Not only does “*In Memoriam*” deal with a theme of universal and deathless interest, but it deals with it in a way thoroughly characteristic of the age. This is best seen by comparing it with the other great English poem dealing with the vital questions of faith and reason. “*Paradise Lost*” was also written to

“Assert eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men ;”

but it was written in the seventeenth century, before the Agnostic had come to question the adequacy of reason to deal with these mighty themes, and before man’s holiest beliefs and hopes had been confronted by the menacing figure of Science. But those days have gone. We live in an age of intellectual unrest and religious doubt. Our faith is no longer an undis-

puted possession. Science reveals to us the boundless wealth of the universe ; but, in so doing, she seems to teach the utter insignificance of human life. She points to the indifference of Nature (see Cantos lv. and lvi.), and teaches that Nature cares neither for the individual nor the race.

“She cries, A thousand types are gone !
I care for nothing, all shall go.”

Make your appeal to Nature, and her only reply is that she brings to life and brings to death, that the spirit is only the breath, and she knows no more. It is these hideous denials that we have to face. You believe that God is love, that “love is creation’s final law ;” but there confronts you the fierce and awful struggle for existence through the world. “There seems to me too much misery in the world,” cried Charles Darwin. “Destruction is the rule ; life is the exception.” “The waste is enormous ; the suffering terrible.”

“In Memoriam” was written in the full knowledge of all this. It was written by one who felt the whole pressure and burden of these problems, as much as any man has done. And yet Tennyson faces them all with an unconquerable faith in Immortal Love and in the spiritual nature and immortal destiny of man. Confronted by these difficulties, he did not try to explain anything away, but fell back

on the revelation of God found in man's nature and confirmed by Christ. In the soul's deepest affections and experiences, in the love that death could not quench, in the inextinguishable spirit of reverence and worship, in the conviction of the absolute claims of righteousness, of the reality of a perfect truth, goodness, beauty—in these, corroborated and sanctioned by Christ, he sought an answer to life's deepest questions. In our own nature he discovered a witness for God, Duty, Immortality, with which he could confront the cold and paralysing negations of the understanding. He tells us in Canto cxxiv. how he found God. It was not by the study of the eagle's wing or the insect's eye, but rather by attending to the deepest beliefs and intuitions of the heart. "*I have felt.*"

When Frederick Maurice dedicated his "Theological Essays" to Tennyson, he did so in the following words: "I have maintained in these Essays that a theology which does not correspond to the deepest thoughts and feelings of human beings cannot be a true theology." And so we may say with reference to every theory of life, every explanation of the universe, that it cannot be true if it does violence to the deepest intuitions of the soul. For they are a more direct and sure witness to the ultimate realities of the universe than the logical understanding.

But further, another fundamental thought of "In Memoriam" is that this witness of our nature has been confirmed by Christ. See Canto xxxvi.—

"Tho' truths in manhood darkly join,
Deep seated in our mystic frame,
We yield all blessing to the name
Of Him that made them current coin."

What then is the fundamental truth to which our nature and Christ bear witness? *That the eternal, creative, Principle of the universe is Absolute Love.* That is the central thought of "In Memoriam." It is true that "Nature, red in tooth and claw," shrieks against the creed, but the poet maintains it for all that. Love is manifestly the deepest and holiest principle in man. Christ was Love, and in Christ we have the deepest Principle of the universe revealed. And we may be sure of this, that to those who can really believe that Immortal Love is the supreme and ultimate reality, the sharpest agony of life is gone. The poet's profoundest faith is expressed in Canto cxxvi., "Love is and was my Lord and King," and in the Introduction, "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love."

And now, springing out of this belief in Immortal Love rises the other belief that bears so immediately on the subject of the whole poem, viz., belief in

Personal Immortality and in the Reunion of all loving and faithful souls beyond death and the grave. The movement of thought which I have endeavoured to describe, but which, to be fully understood, must be carefully studied in the pages of "In Memoriam" itself, began in the shock of personal loss. The whole sky was darkened, life lost its meaning, but through doubt and anguish the sufferer learns that Love is Lord indeed, and out of it springs the certainty that the dead still live. It is the pathetic tenderness with which the poem deals with this theme that has made it a solace to tens of thousands who have been called to part with those who were dearer to them than life. Death is such a stern and awful fact. The silence is almost unbearable. The closer the bond of affection the sharper the agony of separation. But here is one who has sounded all the seas of doubt, who knows all about the anguish, terror, misgivings of the sorrow-stricken soul, and yet in calm, stately, imperishable verse expresses his faith that the dead are alive, and that beyond the grave those now separated will meet and know one another, and sit at endless feast "enjoying each the other's good." (See Cantos xlvii., xxxiv., xxxv.) Faith in God and in Immortality stand or fall together. Life here without a future would be an unfinished thing. "Earth would be darkness at the core." Love

would be robbed of all its nobility and strength, "Half dead to know that it shall die."

In this way, with perfect poetic truth and beauty, "In Memoriam" gives expression to the faith and hope that make us men. No doubt there are many who are disappointed because they do not find in it a fuller statement of the whole system of Christian truth. But the very strength of the poem lies in its delicate reserve. In an age of spiritual perplexity and scientific materialism it is a great thing to keep near to what is fundamental and essential, and to rest faith upon its widest grounds. A more dogmatic element would have weakened its influence.

Although Tennyson spared no pains to perfect his work, and often kept back his poems from publication for years, and even, after that, retouched them again and again, he seems to have been strangely forgetful and careless as to the preservation of his manuscripts. We learn from his brother Frederick that the earliest manuscript of the "Poems: Chiefly Lyrical" was lost out of his greatcoat pocket, and had to be reproduced from memory.¹ And it is related that the entire and only manuscript of the great poem we have been just considering was forgotten and left behind in the drawer of his lodging-house dressing-table in London, and only rescued by

¹ "The Poets and Poetry of the Century," p. 6.

Mr. Coventry Patmore with some difficulty after the lodging had been vacated.

PATRIOTIC POEMS.

There was nothing cosmopolitan about Tennyson. He was English to the heart's core. In "Hands all Round" he declares that the best "Cosmopolite" is the man who best loves his native country. He never doubted that it was among our first duties to keep our British Empire whole, and bid us pray God that our greatness might not fail through craven fears of being great. And yet his was not a false patriotism. He loved England because he loved truth, freedom, righteousness. He would not be bound in blind servility to any political party. He could not understand a patriotism which looked lightly upon the mighty deeds and heroisms of bygone ages. He gloried in the sacrifices that had made England great, and he called upon all her sons to love her, as he did in every fibre of his being, with a "love far-brought from out the storied past."

Circumstances occurred at this time which raised these sentiments to a white heat of enthusiasm. In December of 1851 a great act of treachery was perpetrated in France. Louis Napoleon suddenly struck down the liberties of that country. He was believed to be a man of unscrupulous ambition, who would

not hesitate to make an attack upon this kingdom should he see any prospect of success. There was an impression that England was not prepared for war. An intense dread of danger spread through the country. Tennyson shared these feelings. Like Thomas Carlyle, he held the character of the French Emperor in extreme moral loathing. The fire burst forth in the song, "Britons, Guard your Own"—

"Peace-lovers we, sweet peace we all desire ;
 Peace-lovers we, but who can trust a liar ?
 Peace-lovers, haters
 Of shameless traitors ;
 We hate not France, but this man's heart of stone :
 Britons, guard your own."

Immediately after followed the two pieces, "The Third of February 1852" and "Hands all Round." Before the year had passed Great Britain was called to bury her great chief, the Duke of Wellington, and on the day of the funeral Tennyson published his noble tribute, his "Ode on the Death of the Duke." It was worthy of the occasion. It is, as Sir Henry Taylor said at the time, an ode that will move men "according to their capacity of feeling what is great and true." I pity from my heart the man who can read unmoved the magnificent lines beginning—

"Not once or twice in our rough island-story
 The path of duty was the way to glory."

No better opportunity than the present is likely to occur for drawing the reader's attention to two or three more of the great patriotic poems. "The Charge of the Light Brigade," written in 1854, is too well known and popular to require any comment. "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade" commemorates an equally noble exploit. "The Defence of Lucknow" immortalises the most heroic event in connection with the Indian Mutiny. But the most soul-stirring of them all, to my mind, is the "Revenge." The Englishman who can read it without a feeling of profound reverence for the men who joyfully gave their lives to save their country is a man whom I would rather not know.

"I have fought for Queen and Faith like a valiant
man and true ;

I have only done my duty, as a man is bound
to do :

With a joyful spirit I Sir Richard Grenville
die !'

And he fell upon their decks, and he died."

FARRINGFORD.

In 1853 Tennyson went to reside at Farringford, a charming house standing in its own grounds near Freshwater, in the Isle of Wight. Thither some of the greatest and best in the land have gone on brief visits to the poet, and all have united in con-

fessing that it is an ideal home. One has described it as a "charmed palace with green walls without and speaking walls within." For the outside is covered from base to roof with luxuriant climbing plants, so that the whole house stands robed in 'one lovely garment of green. A delightful garden, laid out by the poet himself and Lady Tennyson, filled with choice shrubs and flowers, with secluded retreats among the limes, and elms, and other noble trees, surrounds the house, and beyond the garden are groves of pine that break the winter blast, a noble down sweeping far away behind, while within sight and hearing roll the waters of the hoary Channel, tumbling its billows on the chalk and sand of the shore.

To this beautiful home the poet removed with his young wife and child. He was forty-four years of age, in the meridian splendour of his powers, full of noble ideals and hopes, which, to a degree not often permitted men in this world, he had the happiness of seeing realised. Being naturally of a shy and reserved disposition, he avoided general society, had little intercourse with the people of the neighbourhood beyond two or three families, and was most happy among his books and in the charmed circle of his own delightful home. As he grew more and more famous, strangers would thrust themselves on his privacy, they would dog

his steps, waylay him in his walks, come up to him with pen and ink and beg his autograph, force their way into his private grounds, and even, it is said, flatten their vulgar faces against the window-panes of the rooms where he was sitting with his family. Thus he came to have a positive horror of a strange face, regarding which some amusing stories are told, but for which we have no room here.

It is interesting, however, and legitimate to notice a few of the more remarkable persons who were invited by the poet to his home. And first of all it throws a good deal of light on the character of Tennyson that he prized the friendship of Frederick Denison Maurice, so much so that he asked him to become godfather to his son Hallam. For Maurice was one of the purest, loftiest, and best abused men that ever lived. He was a most gracious and beautiful soul, with a deep metaphysical mind, and is exercising a wider influence to-day than ever in his life. But in those days he was under a cloud. He had just been expelled from the two professorships he held at King's College, London, because the Council thought his teaching leaned too much in the direction of that "Larger Hope" of which Tennyson sings in the "In Memoriam." The invitation to Farringford is contained in the poem "To the Rev. F. D. Maurice."

Longfellow passed two happy days with Tennyson in 1868 at Farringford. He was delighted with his visit, and said he found his host "very cordial and very amiable; he gave up his whole time to us." A year or two before this, Garibaldi went thither and planted a tree in the garden, from which, however, a branch was broken off before it had been planted twenty-four hours by some ardent Republican. And then again, much later, in 1886, Oliver Wendell Holmes, a true poet himself, known to all the world by the "Poet," "Professor," and "Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table," so full of quiet humour and suggestive thought—most delightful of books—has given us in "Our Hundred Days in Europe" a very pleasant picture of Farringford and its master. "I saw the poet to the best advantage, under his own trees, and walking over his own domain. He took delight in pointing out to me the finest and rarest of his trees, and there were many beauties among them. . . . In this garden of England, the Isle of Wight, where everything grows with such lavish extravagance of greenness that it seems as if it must bankrupt the soil before autumn, I felt as if weary eyes and overtasked brains might reach their happiest haven of rest."

But I have mentioned these merely to give a faint hint of the way in which the first minds in the land were drawn towards our poet, and esteemed

it a privilege and honour to visit him. On the whole, life moved on with quiet dignity from day to day at Farringford. Most of the time was spent by Tennyson in his study, from which there frequently came forth some fresh work that delighted and helped an ever-widening circle of readers.

In 1855 "Maud and Other Poems" was published. It has been remarked that "Maud" shows "more of the local colour of this house by the sea," where it was composed, than any other of his poems. Much of the hostility which first awakened against it has melted away, as its dramatic character has been realised. It must not be thought that all that is said represents the poet's own opinions. Mr. Hutton, whom I have previously quoted, says, "Never was any cry more absurd than the cry made against 'Maud' for the sympathy it was supposed to show with hysterical passion. What it *was* meant to be, and was, though inadequately—the failure being due not to sympathy with hysterics, but to the zeal with which Mr. Tennyson strove to caricature hysterics—was an exposure of hysterics."¹

"Enoch Arden and Other Poems" was a volume published in 1864. In this volume "Lucretius," although exceedingly painful, is probably the most powerful of the poems. Of the touching pathos

¹ *Macmillan's Magazine*, 1872.

and beauty of "Enoch Arden" nothing need be said. Most of the "Idylls of the King" were written during these years, but I shall reserve the consideration of them for the next chapter.

But before closing this chapter there is one little poem to which I should like to direct attention, "The Sailor Boy," published in 1861. It is one of the simplest of his poems; a child may read it and be delighted with it. No moral is pointed out, and yet there is a profound moral lesson in it for every man, viz., that our greatest temptations do not come when we are bravely doing our duty, even although the duty may be full of danger. They come when we shrink from the storms of life, and shelter ourselves in fancied safety from the power of evil. It is the life of idle luxury and self-indulgence that is most to be feared.

"God help me ! save I take my part
Of danger on the roaring sea,
A devil rises in my heart,
Far worse than any death to me."

VIII.

THE LONG AFTERNOON.

“It was a bright and cheerful afternoon.”

“ Self-ease is pain ; thy only rest
Is labour for a worthy end.

A toil that gains with what it yields,
And scatters to its own increase,
And hears, while sowing outward fields,
The harvest song of inward peace.”

—WHITTIER.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LONG AFTERNOON.

“The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past.”—SHELLEY.

AND so the years passed at Farringford. Every returning spring sent a fresh burst of colour and fragrance into the neighbouring woods, and touched the trees and shrubs of the poet's garden into leaf and flower, and filled the air with the happy songs of birds. Through the long golden days of summer the breezes of a softer clime murmured among the groves of pine, and swept gently across the downs; whilst far away the white sails of the stately ships melted into the liquid azure bloom of a crescent sea. Here Tennyson lived a secluded, studious, dignified life. “No one ever passed him and thought him ordinary; no one ever conversed with him and said, ‘How unexpectedly poor!’ ‘There is something great in him,’ said a poor man, ‘which it is above me to understand.’”¹ - Far away from the transient pursuits and ambitions of the noisy world, he lived his

¹ *The Spectator*, October 8, 1892.

own life, thinking high thoughts, and clothing them in words of exquisite grace and melody. He was supremely happy in his home. The discordant notes that have spoiled the music of life for only too many men of genius were unheard at Farringford. An air of gentle chivalry, refinement, and tenderness breathed through the whole family life. Here his second son, Lionel, was born, and honours were showered upon him, and wealth came in fair measure. He grew in the reverence and esteem of the country, and the Queen offered him a baronetcy, which, however, was declined. An ideal home, an ideal life in the garden of England! Not that the sky was always cloudless. He had his sorrows, as all men have. However much a man's own life may be free from distraction and pain, he has at least the burden of the sorrows of others, if he be a true man. The nobler the nature the wider and deeper its sympathies. In 1865 his mother, most tenderly loved, and thirty years a widow, died. Still, as all have recognised, Tennyson's career was one of unusual prosperity and happiness. His fates were kind, and spun for him a "thread out of their choicest and whitest wool." His life was a living poem, with an almost ideal beauty in it.

Somewhere about the time at which we have now arrived in our story, the poet bought an estate near Haslemere, in Surrey, and there built himself a

beautiful house called Aldworth, which stands on the southern slope of Black Down, overlooking one of the finest views in England. There, for the last twenty years of his life, he spent the summer months, enjoying a more bracing air and greater seclusion than could any longer be found at Farringford at that season. The house is furnished with perfect taste, and is surrounded with delightful grounds.

We must now turn to the consideration of some of his works.

“IDYLLS OF THE KING.”

These form the longest and greatest of Tennyson's works. Apart from the magnificent conception of human life that gives unity to them, and makes them the greatest epic poem since John Milton produced the “Paradise Lost,” there are single lines and short passages which, for weight of thought and splendour of diction, surpass anything else that he wrote, and are worthy of a place beside the noblest utterances of Shakespeare. Mr. Richard Holt Hutton, whom I have already quoted, from whom I have learned very much, and regard as the most thoughtful critic of English Literature, has said of “The Passing of Arthur”: “It seems to me to contain the grandest lines he has ever written, lines resonant with the highest chords of spiritual yearn-

ing and bewildered trust, lines which echo and re-echo in one's imagination like the dying tones of the organ in a great cathedral's aisle." The limits of this little book do not permit of quotation, but the thoughtful reader will be able to mark hundreds of felicitous epigrammatic sayings—"Jewels five words long, which on the outstretched forefinger of all time sparkle for ever."

In the "In Memoriam" man confronts the problem of his nature and destiny in the awful mystery of death. "The Idylls of the King" deal with the mystery of evil. Like "Paradise Lost," the "Pilgrim's Progress," "Faust," &c., it possesses a deathless interest; for it is a picture of the everlasting conflict of the human soul with the Adversary. It is a "tale new-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul." No one can be indifferent to that struggle; all must enter the fight. The elements of strife are within; the battle rages everywhere. Each one finds himself a being of

"Strange extremes,
From different natures marvellously mix'd."

And the problem of life is how the diviner part shall achieve its conquest and reign as king.

To set forth the nature of this spiritual struggle in forms of poetic beauty and truth that should for ever hold the hearts of men, John Milton went back

to the story of man's fall in Paradise, and John Bunyan wrote his immortal allegory. Alfred Tennyson in early life read and was charmed with the Arthurian legends, and there is clear evidence that the idea of a great epic founded on them soon rose in his mind. He was manifestly enchained by the complexity of the elements disclosed. He saw in them a profound sense of the moral and spiritual significance of life blended with the stately splendour of chivalry; glorious ideals of a true kingdom of God associated with deadly lusts and passions. The richness of colour, the strange archaic aspect of the picture, delighted his imagination; whilst he saw that the conflict between Sense and Soul waged among those lordly knights and fair ladies in King Arthur's Court was typical of the universal struggle. Tennyson first touched the subject in 1832 in the "Lady of Shalott," and completed it in 1885 by the publication of "Balin and Balan." Thus those old-world legends occupied his mind for fifty years. In 1842 there were four poems dealing with the Arthurian legends. The "Morte d'Arthur," which afterwards formed part of "The Passing of Arthur," was published then, and was introduced with a statement from which we learn that the idea of an "Epic of King Arthur" had been before the poet's mind, but after a great deal of consideration had been abandoned. Why it was laid aside, and why

it came to be taken up again, we may never learn. It is, however, sufficient to know that it was resumed, and that "The Idylls of the King" are the realisation of the idea. It is important to bear in mind that the "Idylls" were published in a most irregular and piecemeal manner, and only completed a few years ago. It is doubtless owing to this fact that their real significance has not been very generally grasped.

A word must be said about the Arthurian legends. They existed all through the Middle Ages in England and various parts of Europe, and in 1485 were collected and published by Sir Thomas Malory, being among the first books printed in England. As might be expected, legends that had floated down through those long dark ages would not have much spiritual unity in them. On the one hand, the most general representation of Arthur is that of a king of unearthly glory, nobleness, wisdom, purity. But, on the other hand, there are stories quite inconsistent with this. Thus, in "The Book of Merlin," Malory tells a story of how Arthur loved and betrayed Bellisent in his youth, not knowing that she was his own half-sister, and thus Modred was born. Farther on he says that Arthur sent for all the children of lords born on May-day, and destroyed them, because Merlin had said, that he that should kill him would be born on May-day. In this way the ruin and

downfall of the kingdom were consequences of Arthur's own early sin. Viewed in this light, the story reads like a Greek tragedy; an inexorable Nemesis pursues the transgressor. But these elements are quite inconsistent with the deeper tradition of Arthur's spiritual glory, and Tennyson has, therefore, wholly eliminated them. In "Guinevere" Arthur says, as he goes forth to the fatal battle—

*"I must strike against the man they call
My sister's son—no kin of mine."*

The downfall of the kingdom is traced to the sin, which, beginning with Lancelot and Guinevere, infected and demoralised the whole Court.

In seeking to grasp the spiritual significance of these "Idylls," it is an error to look on them as mere allegories, like the "Pilgrim's Progress"—virtues and vices dressed up in the clothes of men and women. To do so is to take all reality from them. If King Arthur is only a personification of Conscience, and Guinevere of the Flesh, we know how the story will go, and have no further interest in it. Take the poems as they are written, stories of real men and women, but also representative and typical men and women, and then the more you realise the reality of their sorrows and temptations, their loves and hates, their noble ideals and deadly passions; the more fully you enter into the movement of the poems

as records of actual life, the more intensely you will feel that that life was a real struggle between Sense and Soul, a picture of the mortal battle in which we are all engaged. On the first reading you may be merely interested in the story and think little of its moral significance. There is something so romantic and fascinating in this old world of splendid chivalry. The colouring is so rich and picturesque, that it is delightful to dream away back from this prosaic and utilitarian age to a fairyland of hoary castles and gay tournaments and white marble palaces, and gaze on a brilliant procession of valiant knights and graceful ladies, and catch snatches of their courtly talk as they sweep by on their prancing steeds. For a time that is enough. But it is not long before the poet constrains you to feel that in the midst of all this stately splendour and romance the men and women are of like passions with ourselves, and that here, as everywhere, the struggle between Light and Darkness, Heaven and Hell, for the souls of men, is being waged.

In the light of this explanation, let us look at the "Idylls." King Arthur is a wise, noble-minded knight, in whom the moral principle reigns supreme. He establishes his new Order and makes his knights swear to live lives of purest chastity, to love one maiden only, to redress human wrongs, to reverence their king as their conscience and their

conscience as their king. His whole ambition is to restore order in his realm ; in other words, to make it a true Kingdom of God on earth. Here, then, under the forms of that old chivalry is the work to which every true king, prophet, reformer, statesman, has set himself. He labours to make the world what God meant it to be. And what hinders him ? The answer of the " Idylls " is confirmed by the whole history of mankind. It is nothing outward, visible, tangible. It is the secret poison of lust, greed, hate. It eats its way secretly even into the Court, and brings to dust and shame those who had vowed a deathless loyalty and love. Surely there you have Sense at war with Soul, as you will find it everywhere to-day, in the great city, in the little village, wherever you endeavour to bring in the Kingdom of God. There is nothing unreal or shadowy about it, it is the hard, stern fact of *sin*. The world will not reach its " Heavenly-best " because you have driven out the heathen, and killed the wolf, and boar, and bear. " A God must mingle with the game," and man, who can " half control his doom," must suffer the " Powers of Good " to obtain the mastery within.

And so it would be possible to go through all the " Idylls," and show that whilst each separate Idyll has a relation to the whole, and forms a step in the march of events that lead up to the final downfall of

the kingdom, it has also a completeness in itself. Look at "Gareth and Lynette." What is the moral significance of the picture? Gareth is a young knight whose princely birth is hidden. In the eyes of petulant Lynette he is only a kitchen-knave, and therefore she despises him. She is a worshipper of birth, rank, station; and although he does knightly deeds and reveals a noble mind, she scorns him. She reverences the forms and symbols of greatness, not the reality. But Gareth fights on, and at last wins the day. A noble ambition and love overcome the "lust of the eyes and the pride of life." Gareth and Lynette is just such a conflict between Sense and Soul as we see every day: it is a struggle between "a true ambition and a false pride." In "Geraint and Enid" the conflict assumes the form of a jealous suspicion that tends to overmaster the mind and utterly wreck its happiness. The ordeal is long and bitter, but again the victory falls to the good power, through the invincible might of Enid's love. Here again the conflict is a type of what we see every day. When we turn to "Lancelot and Elaine," we find the sky overcast. Evil has gathered strength through the secret intrigue into which the great and knightly Lancelot has drawn the Queen. In the midst of this guilty attachment the beautiful maid of Astolat, Elaine, appears. She is the fair Lily of Womanhood and she loves Lancelot with a

deathless love, and will hear and believe no evil of him. Here were sweet, stainless little hands held out to him, which, if he would but clasp them, would have power to draw him away from the evil.

“ And peradventure had he seen her first,
She might have made this and that other world,
Another for the sick man ; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.”

The pure sweet Lily was despised, and faded away and died ; whilst Guinevere was secretly loved until the black storm burst that drove them for ever apart, and brought Arthur's fair work crashing to the dust. The story has an eternal significance.

It is impossible to go through all the Idylls, and it is not necessary. Their meaning is clear if we will only throw ourselves into the story as the poet tells it. The limits also of this little book do not permit the discussion of many most interesting questions connected with this great poem, or offer scope for the consideration of what we might consider its defects. The character of Arthur I think the weakest thing in the Idylls. Is he a man that has never experienced any moral struggle ? Has he never been into any wilderness of temptation and done battle with the adversary ? Then he is no man at all—he is only a shadow. Tennyson cannot

have meant that. But if, like all other men, he has had to hold his soul under the assault of evil, how is it that he bears no scars? Was he "made perfect" without suffering? Impossible again. There is where the portrait is weak. There is no sign that he had ever known the agony of the moral conflict. And with all his love for Guinevere there is too much of a spirit of *aloofness* for him to be really perfect. He left his young and beautiful wife too much alone. He moved about absorbed in his great schemes until she thought him cold. "My Lord Arthur, the faultless king, cares not for me." Things might not have gone as they did had the king been more considerate of his wife. But passing by that, we may say with confidence that the "Idylls of the King" will remain one of the few great poems of the world, because, like the others already mentioned, it expresses with a beauty and splendour that must for ever charm the hearts of men, those tremendous and solemn truths that underlie the whole moral and spiritual experiences of our race.

THE DRAMAS.

When Tennyson was verging towards seventy, he took the country considerably by surprise by publishing his drama of "Queen Mary." The public mind was made up regarding the class of works to

be expected from the poet. His place was fixed in the imaginations of his readers, and they did not readily accept the fact that they must reconsider their judgment regarding him. And yet all who had read his works with any care must have seen that there was a dramatic element in them which the poet might develop. On the whole, the opinion of the critics upon "Queen Mary," which was published in 1875, was not very favourable. Nevertheless, the next year "Harold" followed, and then during the subsequent years other dramatic works—"The Cup" in 1881, "The Promise of May" in 1882, "The Falcon" in 1884, and also, during the same year, "Becket."

Looking back on this dramatic period, it may be said with confidence that it will be the three great historical dramas that will give it significance. It was specially with reference to them that George Eliot, a competent judge, said, "Tennyson's plays run Shakespeare's close." Mr. John Richard Green, the historian, said that all his researches into the annals of the twelfth century had not given him so vivid a conception of the character of Henry II. and his court as was embodied in Tennyson's "Becket." In all these dramas there are not only many splendid passages of sustained power, but there are also studies of character revealing penetrating insight. Owing to the fact that Tennyson's dramas are not well fitted for

the stage, a circumstance which he himself fully recognised in publishing "Becket," I do not think they have received justice from the hands of many critics. But time will correct this. "Queen Mary" is a penetrating study of character, and it must be acknowledged that the central figure of all, Mary herself, is presented under much more favourable aspects than the epithet "Bloody" usually attached to her name would suggest. The Mary of this drama is a woman who awakens profoundest pity. She had grown up under the deep sense of wrong done to her mother. She had a passionate love for Philip of Spain—a man of cold, gloomy, pitiless character, disliked by the English people, younger than herself, and who soon neglected her with cruel callousness. Her faith was hostile to the national sentiment, but she was sincere, and believed that to restore the old Church was to bring back the living waters to a parched land. Her life was sad from beginning to end. At the opening of the play she cries—

"I see but the black night, and hear the wolf."

And when she died, Elizabeth could only say—

"Her life was winter, for her spring was nipt."

"Harold" is more full of incident and movement. It was a great moment in English history, and Tennyson makes you feel the stir and vastness of

the issues at stake. The same may be said of "Becket."

The same year that the last of these dramas was published (1884) Tennyson was gazetted Baron of Aldworth and Farringford. Two years later a heavy sorrow fell upon him in the loss of his second son, Lionel, who died on April 20, 1886, whilst returning home from India. Lord Tennyson closes a poem to the Marquis of Dufferin with the following touching lines—

"To question why
The sons before the fathers die,
Not mine ! and I may meet him soon."

In 1880 "*Ballads and other Poems*" was published, a volume which contains several pieces marked by all the old power. Among these specially may be mentioned "*In the Children's Hospital*," "*Rizpah*," "*The Northern Cobbler*," "*The Revenge : A Ballad of the Fleet*," and the "*Defence of Lucknow*," to which I have already referred. "*Tiresias, and other Poems*," was published in 1885, which contains the powerful poem "*Despair*," and then the year following came "*Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*," and in 1889 "*Demeter, and other Poems*."

IX.

SUNSET AND EVENING STAR.

“And after my long voyage I shall rest !”

“ Sunset and Evening Star,
And one clear call for me !
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea.”

CHAPTER IX.

SUNSET AND EVENING STAR.

“ The chamber where the good man meets his fate
Is privileged beyond the common walk
Of virtuous life, quite in the verge of heaven.”

—YOUNG.

OUR little task is now almost done. We have faken a rapid glance at Lord Tennyson's life and work in order to learn their great lessons for us. It only remains to draw together the various threads of thought that have been suggested before gazing on that last scene of almost unearthly beauty and solemnity—“quite in the verge of heaven”—where, without a struggle or a pain, the great career came to its close.

We have seen that Lord Tennyson was both the interpreter and the prophet of his age. He was its interpreter, for he not only entered into all its profoundest thoughts, ideals, hopes, but he was able to give them perfect embodiment and expression. In his poems we find the convictions, enthusiasms, aspirations, that have most deeply moved the men

of this age, exalted and purified by genius, and expressed with an adequacy and beauty found nowhere else. He was, said the *Spectator*,¹ "a poet who to all the higher thoughts that rose amongst us could give in words, whose melody was of itself a satisfying luxury, a full expression and embodiment." He was also the prophet of his age, because he was ever seeking to reveal the divine order of life, the eternal foundations on which individual and national well-being must depend, and was ever warning us of those pitfalls and false lights that beset our path. Hence his voice seemed ever the voice of our deeper self—a voice of warning, encouragement, revelation, and one that we understood. We see this in all the leading interests of life.

Whilst it is true that every age is a period of transition, it is all but universally acknowledged that the term applies in a very special degree to the last fifty years. It has been a time of spiritual trouble. From various causes the deepest beliefs and hopes of good men have been put on their trial. They have been confronted by the menacing figures of Scientific Materialism and Philosophic Agnosticism. And it is evident that Lord Tennyson felt, especially at certain periods of his life, the full pressure of this unrest. A cry of bewildered faith, a confession that he is but a little child groping its way in darkness,

¹ October 8, 1892.

is often heard. He tells us that he falters where he once firmly trod, and can only stretch out lame hands of faith, and faintly trust the larger hope. He could not put aside the spiritual problem. All his greater and more serious works, "The Two Voices," "The Vision of Sin," "In Memoriam," "The Idylls of the King," are occupied with the supreme questions concerning God, the Soul, Duty, Immortality. And the outcome of this period of religious perplexity was for the poet a reaffirmation of the "Everlasting Yea." He was in sympathy with the scientific movement, and hailed the theory of Evolution—"Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good"—with gratitude. But he never lost himself in the intoxication of scientific discovery. He saw that the methods and principles of science were inapplicable in the spiritual region. To the men who in their attempt to explain everything would *explain away* God, the Soul, Freedom, Immortality, he answered, "*I have felt.*" That cannot, of course, remain the *final* answer of Christian philosophy. Our deepest spiritual convictions must be capable of rational justification. We can only rest satisfied with a philosophy that will find a place for both science and religion, reason and faith, nature and the supernatural. But Tennyson showed his greatness and spiritual insight in falling back upon the primary spiritual beliefs and hopes of man, and in

declaring that they must bear a true witness to the realities that underlie existence, and must be neither ignored nor explained away. In this way, as we have seen, he came to believe that the ultimate reality of the universe is Almighty Love, and that there is for man an Immortal Destiny—truths which he found confirmed and revealed by Christ. The fundamental facts and truths of Christianity penetrate all his teaching. Again and again he expresses his faith in prayer, above all, in the beautiful passage in the “*Passing of Arthur*” beginning with “*Pray for my soul.*” The introduction to “*In Memoriam*” is a prayer addressed to Christ. The reader should also notice how the Christian beliefs and hopes underlie all his poems, and especially such poems as “*Enoch Arden*” and the pathetic story of the “*Children’s Hospital.*” And there can be no question as to the reality of his hold on the vital elements of the Christian faith after reading the lines with which he closes “*Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*”—

“Follow you the star that lights a desert pathway, yours or
mine.

Forward, till you see the highest Human Nature is Divine.

Follow light, and do the right—for man can half-control
his doom—

Till you find the deathless angel seated in the vacant
tomb.”

But whilst holding to the essential elements of faith, Tennyson rejected everything that was crude, unreasonable, and immoral. Many doctrines that have been closely identified with Christianity find no place in his poetry, and it is not hard to see that he looked on them with horror. If the reader will turn to the poem called "Despair," he will see what the poet considered to be the natural outcome of the fatalistic and cramping creeds which too often have been substituted for the Gospel of Christ. As Tennyson passed through the fiery ordeal of doubt, the earthly elements of his religious faith were destroyed. His beliefs were deepened, widened, spiritualised, touched with broader sympathies and a larger charity and hopefulness.

Lord Tennyson, then, was a Prophet of Faith—faith in God, Duty, Immortality. Life must be supported by this faith or it will lose all strength, aim, worth. But when it rests upon this foundation, it will grow pure, efficient, noble. Only in the recognition of this truth had he hope of progress. As he advanced in life especially he came to value less and less those things on which we are inclined to lay great stress—our mechanical advances, our control of the forces of Nature, and our wider political privileges. Is human life really nobler for all these miracles of science? What is the value of the freedom of speech and the extension of the suffrage if

those who speak and vote have not self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-control? We talk of our wealth, science, progress, but what if crime and hunger cast our maidens by thousands on the street, and city children grow up amid foul disease and with blackened souls? These are the questions the poet asks in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After." He had no faith in the world reaching its golden age through revolution—"the red fool-fury of the Seine"—nor by political changes, nor by any mere material progress. It could only come by the growth of the people in knowledge, purity, righteousness, love. He saw the tremendous power which woman exercises over the destinies of the world, and very much of his poetry is employed in setting forth her various relations to man, and how she helps to make or mar his life. A spirit of noble chivalry and reverence for woman pervades all his works, and the ideal he ever holds up before man is that of a chaste, pure, virtuous life. He loved England with all his heart, and went back to some of the grandest episodes in her history in order to call forth a love for his country in the hearts of the men of this age, a love strong as his own, and based upon a deep conviction of the greatness of the past and the noble possibilities of the future. These are some of the great interests he touched, but they are only hints. I shall have best fulfilled my task if this little book should

lead my readers to turn to the works of Tennyson with new interest, and to study them carefully. I am sure that such a study may become a source of life-long enjoyment and profit.

And now we turn from the works of the great teacher, prophet, poet, to the man himself. What has struck all who have written about Lord Tennyson is the ideal nobleness and completeness of his life and character. He lived on to an advanced age, and yet to the last retained his clearness of vision and strength of mind. Through all those long years he was seen

“Wearing the white flower of a blameless life
Before a thousand peering littlenesses.”

There was a remarkable aloofness in his relation to the general public, which many mistook for haughtiness, but which, in such a mob-worshipping age as this, was pleasant to behold. “It is,” says Sir Edwin Arnold, “something to know that Tennyson’s wedded life was one of no common brightness and sunshine, and that, like not a few of our greatest men, he was indebted to his wife for those long years of freedom from personal care and trouble which he devoted to the service of mankind.”

Lord Tennyson enjoyed good health. He had a severe attack of illness a few years ago; but he recovered from it, and, for a man of his years,

showed remarkable energy and strength. Still, we are informed that months before the end an alarm was sounded, and his family were keenly alive to the necessity for extra care. Towards the end of September he was sufficiently ill to summon special medical aid, and from that time he gradually sank. The news that he was very unwell spread through the nation, and the feeling was everywhere entertained that the great poet was approaching the last solemn event he had so often and earnestly contemplated. All the members of his family were around him. The last day was one of almost unearthly beauty. From the mullioned window of the room where the poet lay he could gaze out on the wide peaceful fields and the silent hills, over which a deep, pure, blue sky stretched in all the softened glory of an October sun. From time to time he wakened out of the painless dreamy state into which he had fallen, and looked out on the silence and sunlight. As the sun went down, a white mist fell upon the valley, and the deep blue of the sky grew pale with reflected light, and shone like a glittering dome. Slowly the stars came out, and grew bigger and brighter, until at last a full moon sailed up the cloudless sky, and flooded the room in which the poet lay, like a figure of breathing marble, with its soft and silvery light. There were no other lights in the room. All was silence. The last words of

farewell had been spoken. And so the majestic figure lay, "drawing thicker breath," without a pain, without a struggle, reminding those who watched of his own "Passing of King Arthur," until the end came in that still silent and softened glory, and he, who had so often turned wistfully but hopefully to that silent mystery of Death, heard the clear call to depart, and, "carried by the flood from out this bourne of Time and Place," passed into the Eternal Home. He died on October 6, 1892, and, amid all the solemn rites by which a great nation pays its last tribute of reverence to its mighty dead, was buried in Westminster Abbey on October the 12th.

"Now the labourer's task is o'er ;
Now the battle day is past ;
Now upon the farther shore
Lands the voyager at last.
Father, in Thy gracious keeping
Leave we now Thy servant sleeping."

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